

NORA LESTER

FIVE CENTS

ANNA HOWARTH



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# NORA LESTER

BY

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'SWORD AND ASSEGAI'

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# NORA LESTER

## CHAPTER I

'The powers and the ground of friendship is a mystery.'

ON the open, bare summit of the down, foursquare to all the winds of heaven, stood the orphanage.

It was a huge red-brick building, with a clock tower in the centre, and long even rows of windows, which in the front flashed back the rays of the setting sun, and at the back those of the rising sun. It was ugly, but symmetrical, and, by reason of its size and its symmetry, imposing.

The orphans had everything that benevolence could bestow upon them to supply the place of the parents and the home of which fate had deprived them. They had food, clothing, and beds ; they had education suitable to their (probable) position in life ; they had amusement within proper bounds, and kindness, also within proper bounds. They had healthy exercise, both for mind and body ; they were encouraged to walk in the paths of virtue, and deterred by punishment from wrong-doing. It followed, therefore, from these premises, that the orphans, some hundreds in number, were both virtuous and happy ; and having settled this point satisfactorily, we will proceed to make the personal acquaintance of the only two of them with whom our story is in any way concerned. In the grounds of the orphanage there was a large shed, used as a workshop, containing a carpenter's bench, a small forge, and all kinds of tools and implements, where the boys could learn the rudiments of useful trades,

to which, as a rule, they were afterwards apprenticed. To some of them it was the most homelike room in the whole institution.

It was somewhat late on a June evening, when the hours of work were over, and the rows of windows in front were glowing with the mysterious fires of sunset, and most of the orphans, released from rules for the moment, were playing games at their own sweet will in the garden, that two boys were seated together in the workshop, which they had entirely to themselves.

It was already half dark in the large shed, a shimmering twilight hid the roof and the cobwebbed corners; the tools lay idle; half-finished pieces of work, in various stages of imperfection, stood here and there; the floor was littered with shavings and sawdust. At one end of the shed, however, there was a bright spot of light, where some glowing red embers were still left from the forge fire; and with this red radiance, the dying daylight, entering through an unglazed window, mingled incongruously.

The figures of the two boys were lit up by the opposing gleams of light on either side of them. The elder one was seated at the forge, on a turned up box, and the younger on the ground at his feet.

The elder boy was fourteen, but looked older. He was tall and square-shouldered, with a big bony frame, and large firm hands, with tapering sensitive finger-tips. His hair was very fair and smooth, lying close to his well-shaped head; his eyes and eyebrows, on the contrary, were dark brown, and the former had a penetrating quality in their glance which was not diminished by the circumstance that they were shortsighted, and always looked from behind glasses. There was a gravity, almost a sternness, about his features in repose, which was unusual and seemed unsuitable in a boy of his years. His companion was in every way as great a contrast to him as could well be imagined. He was a child of not more than seven years old, delicately, girlishly pretty. Thick dark curls clustered round his small head, his olive-tinted complexion and large, liquid grey eyes suggested a foreign extraction, and the graceful lines and curves

of his slim figure were noticeable even under the ill-shaped grey uniform which disguised it.

No two children in the whole institution were such close friends as these two lads, dissimilar in every respect. Except by the exigencies of their studies and occupations, they were never separated. ‘Gronow and his shadow,’ the other boys called them. By special favour of the matron they slept in adjoining beds : and on many a cold winter night did little Noel, against the rule of the dormitory, creep into his companion’s bed, and then first get some warmth into his shivering limbs. By reason of his history, which shall presently be related, and of his engaging manners and appearance, Noel was the pet and the spoilt child of the establishment—could there be such a thing in such a well-ordered household ; while Gronow was one of those strong and independent characters who can violate rules without getting into trouble.

One afternoon, some seven years before this story opens, a gentleman, who happened to be on the committee of the orphanage, was riding through a village not many miles away, when he observed a little boy in very ragged clothes, sitting in front of an old cattle trough by the roadside, which he had filled with sand, in which he was patiently tracing with a stick the letters of the alphabet. Something in the child’s aspect, his steady absorption in his task, his miserable condition, attracted the gentleman’s attention ; he spoke to him, and asked him what he was doing that for.

‘I want to read and write,’ the boy said, without looking up, ‘but father won’t send me to school. So I got Jim to teach me the letters, and now I can make them all.’

He kept on steadily, and the gentleman was struck with the determination expressed in the childish face and voice.

A few steps further on was the village inn, and from the door of this, as the gentleman approached it, a very drunken man was forcibly ejected by the landlord and the barman.

The gentleman dismounted and asked for a glass of ale, which was brought to him.

‘It is early in the day for that fellow to be so drunk,’ he observed, watching the ejected customer, who was reeling up

the road, liberally cursing the landlord as he went ; ‘he is a fine, powerful-looking man, too. He ought to be at work.’

‘Bless you, sir, no one will keep him,’ replied the landlord ; ‘he was working on the new railway here, and he’s a good workman when sober, but they turned him off last week. They couldn’t stand him no longer, and I won’t have him in my place again, I swear.’

‘Has he any family ?’

‘His wife died six months agone, of a broken heart they do say. She was an English woman, but he’s a Swede—Neilson’s his name. That’s his boy there, making his letters in the old trough. He got my Jim to teach him. He’s a good little chap, and I give him his meals here many a time, or I think he’d starve. The little bit he eats don’t make any difference to me.’

The kind-hearted gentleman was touched and interested. He inquired fully into the boy’s circumstances, ascertained that the father was quite willing to part with him, and finally used his interest in such a manner that Gronow Neilson was admitted to the orphanage, in which he had now passed nearly seven years of his life, there to be trained up in the way he should go, and started on some useful career in the world.

In the last days of December of that same year when Gronow entered the orphanage there were terrible gales and storms off the south coast of England. In one of these storms a small trading vessel from a South African port was wrecked off the Cornish coast. None of her crew were ever seen alive ; but there was washed ashore a baby, lashed to a spar, and, strange to say, the baby was not dead. A fisherman carried it to his cottage, where his wife with patient effort, kindled into a flame the feeble spark of life ; but no trace could be found of the poor little being’s parents or belongings. The only other thing recovered from the wrecked vessel was a board with the name on—*Roumania*.

The child was a boy, apparently about nine months old. His clothes were plain, but neat, and marked only with a D. The vicar of the parish where the vessel was wrecked took him over for a time from the fisherman who had rescued him ;

but as his own table was, so to speak, already overgrown with olive branches, he could not keep him permanently. He baptized the child, in case the ceremony should not have been already performed; and as he had no clue to his name, except the D, which probably stood for his surname, and as it was just Christmas time, he called him Noel.

Subsequent inquiries and researches threw no light at all upon Noel's parentage, and brought forward no friends or relatives, either in South Africa or in England; and eventually, through the exertions of some friends of the vicar's, he was admitted into the self-same orphanage as Gronow Neilson.

Gronow in the three months that he had been there had made no particular friends. He was very reserved, and quite remarkably silent. He never spoke unless he had something to say, and then he said it as briefly as possible. His conduct was unexceptionable. He did what he was told with a matter-of-course air, and when he broke a rule he did it openly, and gave the reason for it frankly; and he was seldom punished. He was generally willing to oblige a companion, but the other children did not understand him, and he was not a favourite with them.

From the day that little Noel was brought into the establishment, Gronow simply adopted him. In the course of a few weeks he ousted the nurse altogether. He carried the child about, morning, noon, and night, learned how to give him his food, put him to sleep, amused him when he was awake, and seriously undertook his education. The only two things he was not allowed to do were to have the baby in his bed at night (though he begged hard for this privilege), and to bring it into school with him, which as he had the sense to see for himself, would not do. Gronow's school hours, however, were not long at this period of his life, and he willingly gave up his play to nurse Noel. As years went on his devotion never slackened, and it was natural that Noel should return it, though not, perhaps, in the same degree. Noel, unlike Gronow, was friends with everyone, and a general favourite: having so many among whom to divide his affections, he could not concentrate them so entirely upon one object; nevertheless, he always clung to Gronow as his chief

protector and tower of strength. On one occasion, when Noel was about five years old, Gronow found a big boy bullying him, and of course they fought. Gronow was extremely strong, and the other boy, finding that he was getting the worst of it, made mean use of a penknife; in consequence of which Gronow had a scar on his arm five inches long, which always showed when he pulled up his sleeve. Noel shed many a tear over that scar, which became an extra bond of friendship between them.

Gronow had more than once been questioned as to the cause of his steady attachment to Noel, but the most that could ever be extracted from him was that 'he was so little and had no one belonging to him.'

It is time, however, to return to the workshop. Gronow had melted some lead, and was engaged in fashioning it into all sorts of shapes: a process which Noel, from a cushion of shavings and sawdust, watched with absorbed interest.

Gronow's fingers were deft, and he always gave his whole attention to whatever he was doing, so that the half-cold lead assumed some very pretty forms under his skilful handling. At last he succeeded in making a neat little leaden anchor, with a ring attached to it.

'Oh, Gronow, do give it to me!' cried Noel enchanted, 'because I was taken out of the sea you know, and I can put a thread through it, and wear it round my neck.'

'All right,' said Gronow, handing it to him, 'only you must keep it always. And then, if ever I am away from you, and you are in trouble, you can send me the anchor, and I shall come and help you.'

This was a wonderfully romantic flight for Gronow, and Noel was charmed with the idea, but suddenly he became grave, and almost tearful.

'But why do you talk about being away from me, Gronow? You mustn't *ever* go away from me. What shall I do?'

Gronow laid aside his implements, pushed back the box he was sitting on, and put his hand on Noel's curly head.

'I expect I shall have to go away from you for a bit,'

he said, 'because I can't stay here much longer, and you are too little to go away yet. But I shall work hard, and earn money, and as soon as I have got a room of my own you shall come to me, and we will live together.'

'Just we two by ourselves?' asked Noel.

'Yes,' answered Gronow.

Noel considered the matter gravely for a moment, and then he jumped up, casting all care to the winds.

'I must go and ask matron for a thread,' he said, 'and I will put on my anchor, and wear it always.'

He skipped away, and Gronow followed him more slowly. He closed the workshop door carefully, and walked across the garden, deep in thought.

The committee of the orphanage held a meeting there once a month, at which the accounts were submitted to them, and all business connected with the institution and its inmates discussed.

After the foregoing conversation in the workshop, Gronow went to the superintendent, and asked if he might go before the committee at their next meeting, as he had something to say to them.

'What, have you a complaint to make?' the superintendent asked, smiling.

'No, sir,' replied Gronow very gravely; 'I wish to ask them if they will let me go out now and earn my own living.'

'They will tell you that you are too young,' said the superintendent, 'and so you are, you know.'

'I don't think so, sir. I should like to ask them.'

'*You* don't think so!' the superintendent repeated, smiling again, for he knew Gronow. 'Well, there is no objection to your going before the committee, at all. I will go with you.'

'Thank you, sir,' and Gronow withdrew.

At the next committee meeting, therefore, Gronow appeared, under the ægis of the superintendent, who said:

'This is young Neilson; he has a request to make.'

Mr. Barrow, the gentleman who had first taken up Gronow, happened to be there, and he said kindly:

'Tell us what you want, my boy.'

'If you please, gentlemen,' said Gronow, who was quite self-possessed, 'I should be very grateful if you would allow me to leave the orphanage now, and earn my own living.'

'How old are you?' asked another gentleman.

'Fourteen, sir.'

'We do not usually apprentice our boys until they are at least fifteen.'

'I know, sir; but I am big, strong, and able to work much harder than I do here. I wish to learn different things and to be independent.'

'Very praiseworthy,' murmured a third gentleman.

'A great credit to the institution,' put in a fourth.

'What do *you* think, sir?' asked Mr. Barrow, suddenly appealing to the superintendent.

'I think you might let the boy go, gentlemen,' replied that functionary; 'he is thoughtful for his age, and his conduct has always been good. I don't believe he would choose bad companions, or be easily led into harm. And he *can* work.'

'Is there any kind of work you particularly like, that you would choose for yourself?' Mr. Barrow asked, turning to Gronow.

'Yes, sir,' the boy replied without hesitation; 'I should like to understand about machinery, and engines of all kinds, and to work with them. And I should like to know how roads and railways are made, and bridges are built, and all such things.'

'You must make him a civil engineer,' observed one of the committee jocularly.

'He may yet come to that one of these days,' replied Mr. Barrow quietly, 'meanwhile we might place him in the railway workshops, or with good working mechanical engineers, such as Trent Brothers.'

'We will consider the matter, Neilson,' the chairman of the committee said to Gronow, 'and you shall have whatever help we can give you. You may go now.'

'Thank you, gentlemen,' said Gronow, and making a polite bow he retired.

Gronow knew well enough that he was not by birth a gentleman; but he was determined to raise himself to a high

position in the profession of his choice, and he knew that to acquire the manners and bearing of a gentleman would be a great help to him. He therefore studied them whenever he had the opportunity, which was not very often, certainly, and he took great pains to speak correctly, and to pronounce his words properly. In this he was greatly assisted, strange to say, by the constant companionship of Noel. Noel was one of those children to whom refinement is natural, it is born with them. He disliked loud voices, rough ways, and bad manners at table, and never had to be reproved for any of these things. He was a little gentleman, and Gronow learned many a lesson of politeness from him. Instruction, of whatever kind, was never wasted on Gronow, so great was his anxiety to learn. About a fortnight later the superintendent sent for him, and informed him that he was to be bound for five years to Messrs. Trent Brothers, who made all kinds of machinery, and that if he were diligent it was a great opportunity for him. He would begin to earn a small wage in three months, and his future progress would depend very much on himself. The superintendent added some kindly words of advice, and exhorted him not to forget his schooling.

'Oh, no, sir,' said Gronow; 'I should like to attend a night school, and I can go to the Free Library to read.'

Noel was quite inconsolable when Gronow announced to him his departure. He cried bitterly, clung round his neck, and declared he could never bear the ugly old place without him.

'Never mind, chappie; cheer up,' said Gronow; 'when I get a holiday I'll come and see you. And I'll write you a letter every week. You can write quite nicely, so you must write to me, too. And one of these days we'll have our rooms together, you and I, and we'll be chums all our lives.'

He talked thus, and drew pictures of the future, until Noel began to smile again; but all the while Gronow himself was feeling the parting most keenly. There was nothing and no one else in the place that he particularly regretted, and he was far too much interested in his future career and the new life that lay before him to care about any of those things that lay behind him.

But the little fellow whom he had nursed as a baby, and watched over and tended for seven years—who was as a younger brother to him, and dwelt in recesses of his heart which no one else had ever penetrated—from him it was really hard to part, and Gronow knew that for many a day he would sorely miss the pretty, bright little face, the soft, lisping voice, the endearing ways of his child-friend. However, it was only for a time. The busy, hopeful years would bring them together again, firmer friends than ever.

## CHAPTER II

'By what astrology of fear or hope  
 Dare I to cast thy horoscope !  
 Like the new moon thy life appears ;  
 A little strip of silver light,  
 And widening outwards into night  
 The shadowy disk of future years.'

ONE day, about six months after Gronow's departure, a party of ladies came to visit the orphanage. One of them was an old lady, very erect, with snowy hair, handsome features, and an eye-glass on a long handle. Noel caught sight of her, and was very much impressed. One of his companions whispered to him that she was the Honourable Miss Lanyon. How he knew it Noel could not tell; but he felt still more impressed.

There was a small, dark, bird-like lady, who was continually at Miss Lanyon's elbow, making remarks, inaudible to the rest of the company, apparently about the children, whom she observed keenly. This lady presently drew the matron on one side, and said to her, confidently :

'The fact is, Miss Lanyon wishes to adopt a child. It is a strange fancy of hers, and I have tried, as her most intimate friend, to discourage it, but she is quite set upon it. She came here solely with the idea of finding the child she wants, but I told her she was not at all likely to succeed. These children are all, I suppose, from the lower classes, and Miss Lanyon is so very fastidious.'

'Some of them are very nice children,' said the matron, rather drily. 'Does Miss Lanyon want a girl or a boy?'

'I don't believe she has really made up her mind; but, of course, a girl would be most companionable to her.'

'And about what age?'

'From five to seven years old, about. Are there any at all refined little girls here?'

The matron, who was annoyed by the lady's manner, did not at once reply ; and at that moment Miss Lanyon's eye fell upon Noel, and Noel's fate was sealed.

' That is a lovely boy, Miss Calthrop ; do you see him ? That foreign-looking child with the dark curls and splendid eyes. I am sure he is refined and intelligent.' She turned to the matron, and asked her several questions about Noel. Her manner, if rather stiff, was much more pleasing than Miss Calthrop's, and the matron readily imparted to her Noel's brief history, and spoke warmly in his praise. Miss Lanyon's interest was still further aroused. She seated herself, and had Noel brought to her.

' What is your name, my dear ? '

' Noel, ma'am.'

' Noel—that is a pretty name. And what else ? '

' Nothing else,' replied Noel, looking rather puzzled.

' We don't really know anything about him, you see, Madam,' explained the matron ; ' he was called Noel because he was washed ashore just at Christmas time, and he has never had any other name.'

' It is just as well—he can take my name,' observed Miss Lanyon. Then, addressing herself again to Noel :

' Should you like to live in a nice house by the seaside, and have nice clothes, and plenty of toys, and money of your own when you are grown up, to spend as you like ? '

Noel was rather frightened at the tall old lady, and did not quite grasp the brilliancy of the prospect held out to him ; he looked at the matron, but getting no enlightenment from that quarter, he replied :

' Yes, ma'am, I should like it very much,' simply because he thought it the most polite thing to say.

' I will take him,' said Miss Lanyon abruptly to Miss Calthrop, who smiled in the manner of a person pretending to like a very nasty dose, and said, scarcely glancing at Noel :

' One can hardly judge of his appearance in those hideous clothes. No doubt he will be greatly improved by being decently dressed.'

'His clothes have nothing to do with it,' Miss Lanyon replied crushingly, and then, having no further interest in the orphanage, she rose to take her departure.

Certain preliminary rites and ceremonies had to be gone through before Noel could change his guardians, and then there came one day a carriage and pair, with coachman and footman on the box, and whirled him away to undreamed of splendour, leaving all the other orphans consumed with envy, and far from being content with that state of life to which they had been called.

Miss Lanyon lived at Brighton, in one of the largest houses in one of the most fashionable squares. Noel had a maid to wait upon him, dress him, and take him out for walks. Miss Lanyon took him out for drives, bought him clothes, and books and toys, and was very kind to him, in a rather stiff and unapproachable manner. She made him call her 'Aunt,' and told him that his name henceforth was Noel Lanyon. After he had been with her some little time he lost his awe of her, to a great extent, and one day he ventured to ask her why she was the Honourable Miss Lanyon, and whether he would some day be Honourable too.

Miss Lanyon actually laughed quite heartily, and told him no, she could not do that for him, but that he could not possibly be anything better than a simple gentleman.

Noel was sent to a select school for three hours every morning, and there, as was his wont, he quickly made many friends; but we must not do him the injustice to suppose that he had altogether forgotten his first friend. As long as he was at the orphanage he received Gronow's letters every week, and had written to him several times. A day or two after his arrival in his new home he asked Miss Lanyon, rather timidly, whether he might write to Gronow, and also whether he might some day go and see him.

'Who is Gronow?' asked Miss Lanyon.

Noel explained, laying great stress on Gronow's goodness to him.

'And where does he live now?'

'He works in a machine shop,' said Noel.

'Well,' said Miss Lanyon, 'you cannot have a friend who works in a machine shop—that is quite out of the question. But as a gentleman is never rude or ungrateful to anyone, you may write to Gronow, and tell him that you are very sorry your friendship cannot continue, as your position in life is quite altered, but that you will always remember his kindness to you, and be grateful to him for it.'

Noel shed many tears over the composition of this letter, but he wrote it, for he never dreamed of disobeying Miss Lanyon, or doubting that she could be right. He waited anxiously for an answer to it, but none came. At first he thought that Gronow was vexed with him, then he decided that Gronow had forgotten him, and finally, the impression of Gronow began to fade from his mind. After all, he was but a child of eight years old; impressions with him had never yet been very deep, and at present his life was filled with pleasant novelties, which had almost obliterated the memory of his life at the orphanage. There was nothing and no one to remind him of it, and as Gronow was entirely associated with it, when he ceased to write his memory faded also.

Noel's life at Brighton was an easy and a happy one. It is true he had an easy and happy temper, which goes a great deal further toward making life happy than any outward circumstances. Had he been a boisterous, noisy, mischievous boy, there was much in his own life that would have been irksome to him; but he was not that. He was merry and lively enough; but he did not mind being dressed up, sitting quiet in the drawing-room, and behaving prettily. To behave prettily came natural to him.

Miss Lanyon was very much pleased with Noel, and still more so with herself. Her adventure had turned out a success, instead of being, as everyone had prophesied it would be, a failure. Noel had, or appeared to have, no serious faults. He had been trained to obedience at the orphanage; he was engagingly frank and open; he was good tempered and obliging.

Occasionally, and rather unaccountably, he would fly into a sudden passion, but it was soon over, and directly afterwards he would make the most winning apologies. His

schoolmaster privately characterised him as superficial; but in the shallowest waters one may sometimes stumble into unexpected depths.

Miss Lanyon was very strict with him at first, but when she found out how very amenable he was, she relaxed her strictness considerably. A boy who so seldom wanted to do anything really naughty could be safely left to do pretty much as he liked. So thought Miss Lanyon.

Everyone liked Noel, if only because there was nothing about him that anyone could dislike; yet there was one exception to this rule, and that was Miss Calthrop. Not that she was ever so ill-advised as to show it; on the contrary, from the time that Noel became an inmate of Miss Lanyon's house, her affection for him was almost effusive. Noel himself, however, had an inward conviction, for which he could have given no reason, but which he always retained, that she did not like him.

Miss Calthrop lived next door to Miss Lanyon, in whose house she spent quite as much time as in her own. She had a very old, invalid mother, whom she was supposed to nurse devotedly; but, as a matter of fact, she kept an incomparable maid who did all the real work of waiting on and looking after the old lady, while a footman took her out every day in her bath-chair.

Unkind people said that Miss Calthrop was after Miss Lanyon's money, Miss Lanyon having, as far as was known, no relatives to inherit it. Old Mrs. Calthrop's income was in great part derived from a pension which died with her, so that after her mother's death Miss Calthrop would have to live in a much smaller way, unless she could tap some other resources. She had, at various times, made praiseworthy efforts to marry money; but money had declined to be captivated, and Miss Calthrop's charms were now on the wane.

Noel was not very fond of his books, but he was not idle, because he liked the masters to be pleased with him. He was quite as fond of stories, however, as most children, and when he had read all his own books he ransacked Miss Lanyon's library, but without much reward, for her taste in literature was decidedly old fashioned. One wet afternoon,

however, when he was out of an occupation, Miss Lanyon called him, and, giving him a little key, told him that it unlocked a cupboard in one of the spare bedrooms, where he would find some story books which he might read.

Noel went off in great delight, and found that the cupboard yielded untold riches: two shelves full of real boy's books, Marryat, Mayne Reid, and Kingston, treasures as yet unexplored by him. There were other things besides books in the cupboard: an old bat, a broken-bladed penknife, a pair of reins, and the mutilated fragments of a wooden horse.

The bat had 'C.D.' scatched on it in large letters, and Noel wondered who C.D. was. Then, on the fly-leaf of one of the books, he found 'C. Dupleix,' and finally, in another of them, written in Miss Lanyon's neat, fine handwriting, 'Christian Dupleix,' with a date about twenty-five years back. Noel's curiosity was aroused, and he took the first opportunity of saying to Miss Lanyon:

'Aunt, who was Christian Dupleix?'

'He was a very naughty little boy,' replied Miss Lanyon, severely, 'and I hope you will never be like him.'

Her manner forbade further questions; but Noel had a large bump of curiosity, and his desire to know more about the naughty Christian increased every day. At last it occurred to him that Miss Calthrop might be able to tell him something about this mysterious character. He did not like asking Miss Calthrop, but curiosity overcame his reluctance, and one day, when he chanced to be alone with her, he said to her:

'Miss Calthrop, do you know anything about Christian Dupleix?'

Miss Calthrop looked at him with a peculiar expression.

'Yes,' she replied. 'He was Miss Lanyon's real nephew, and when he was a little boy he lived with her, as you do, because his parents were dead.'

'And why was he so very naughty?'

'He disobeyed his aunt, and did not try to please her. She was much stricter with him than she is with you.'

This was not true, but Noel did not suspect it.

'Was she unkind to him?' he asked.

'No, of course not ; but perhaps he thought her unkind, because he was only a foolish little boy.'

'Where is he now ?'

'Most likely he is dead. He ran away, and was never heard of any more.'

Noel's sympathies were fairly enlisted on the side of the recreant Christian. Many a romantic tale did he weave about him thereafter, and ended by magnifying him into a hero. He understood that he was not to talk about him to Miss Lanyon, but one evening, when they were alone together in the drawing-room, he suddenly concluded a long train of thought by saying aloud :

'My real name began with D too.'

'What do you mean ?' asked Miss Lanyon sharply.

'It was on my clothes,' Noel explained, 'that I had on when I was picked up.'

'There are plenty of names beginning with D,' Miss Lanyon remarked, rather irrelevantly ; 'your name is Lanyon now.'

Noel was fond of Miss Lanyon, of course, but he never seemed to draw quite near to her. She was very kind to him, but she was not a motherly woman, and always remained somewhat unapproachable. She was subject at times to fits of depression, when she was moody, irritable, and hard to please. These might have been due to severe headaches from which she suffered occasionally. At these times even Miss Calthrop, to whom the old lady was really attached, felt that she was walking on very thin ice, and judged it prudent to keep out of the way for a day or two. Noel, however, behaved just as usual, and for this very reason, perhaps, his presence did not seem to irritate Miss Lanyon, even on her worst days.

Noel sometimes caught her looking at him with an expression something like fear in her eyes ; but that must have been his fancy, for how could Miss Lanyon be afraid in any way of a little boy like himself ?

Sometimes his busy fancy set him to weaving romances about his own birth and parentage. It was, of course, highly improbable that a duke or an earl should have been

a chance passenger on board a small cargo vessel ; nevertheless, Noel's flights of imagination seldom descended lower than that. He once overheard Miss Lanyon say to a visitor that she was certain Noel's parents must have been gentlefolk ; but Noel himself, after much reflection and romancing, felt certain that they must have been titled aristocracy of some degree.

After the introduction of Christian Dupleix into his aerial fancies, he connected the recreant hero with his own destinies, and together they shared many adventures, eventually discovering that they were brothers or cousins. He always thought of Christian as a boy of his own age, although it was evident that if he could read story books twenty-five years ago, he must by this time be a man past thirty. These discrepancies, however, do not trouble children of Noel's age, and besides, Miss Calthrop had said that Christian was probably dead, in which case Noel was free to imagine what he liked about him.

As time went on, however, practical life and the outside world became more interesting to Noel than castle-building and day-dreams. His studies, his games, his companions, occupied his thoughts, to the gradual exclusion of unknown parents, and mysterious heroes with no personality beyond a name in an old book ; and Christian Dupleix receded into the background of his mind, together with the dim memory of his life at the orphanage, and Gronow Neilson.

## CHAPTER III

‘My will is as much my own as my constitution ; and no more concerned in the will of another man, than my breath and body is in another man’s. For though we are born for the service of each other, yet our liberty is independent. Otherwise my neighbour’s fault might be my misfortune.’

AND what of Gronow all this time ?

The workshops of Messrs. Trent Brothers, where Gronow was to serve his apprenticeship, were in the heart of the City of London, not far from the riverside. They had also a large retail store in the West End.

Gronow had never been in London in his life. To some people London is depressing, to some it is appalling ; to young people, starting on a busy career, it is stimulating. Gronow found it so. The vast numbers of human beings, doing such a vast amount of work every day, the stupendous traffic, even the pall of smoke which signified the roaring activity of so many million fires ; all these surroundings were to him grand, magnificent, inspiring. No place in the world, he thought, could afford finer opportunities to ambition, or broader roads to success.

Gronow was bound to succeed, since he had both talent and purpose. Talent without purpose is worthless ; purpose without talent falls short of distinction ; but the two combined are irresistible.

Moreover, Gronow had the quality of concentrating all his powers on the attainment of one or two objects, which he always kept in view, and from which he allowed nothing to divert him. One of his objects was to get money enough to educate himself as an engineer ; the other was to make a little house for himself and Noel. To attain these two, he was prepared to surmount any obstacles.

It was with Gronow at the workshop, as at the

orphanage: his silence, gravity, and reticence made him unpopular. His fellow workmen took him to be sixteen or seventeen years old, and he did not trouble to undeceive them. His idea was to go his own way and trouble himself about no one, not realising that it was worth his while to make friends; friends being as useful an asset in going through life as knowledge.

Gronow's desire for knowledge was boundless; nothing came amiss to him. He attended shorthand classes, lectures on chemistry and on geology; he read every scientific book he could lay hands on; it would all be useful to him, he thought, some day. Most of his leisure hours were occupied with diversions such as these; some of them, however, he spent in wandering about London, and making himself acquainted with the wonders of the great city.

It was arranged for him to lodge with the workman under whose immediate supervision he was placed on entering the workshop.

This was a man named Forrest, who had himself a good deal of education, and was superior to most of his comrades. He had a name for being very severe with young apprentices, and expecting a good deal of them; but this was no hardship to Gronow, who had never been softly reared, and who felt himself quite capable of fulfilling any demands that might be made upon him.

Forrest found him a pupil after his own heart; a boy who never wanted to play, who was quick to learn, and at the same time persevering, who did not grumble if he worked a little overtime, and who had more sense than half the grown-up men—was a phenomenon that had never before come within Forrest's experience. He showed no favour to Gronow, but helped him on in many ways.

Forrest was a married man, and had a small house in a quiet little street on the south side of the river. Gronow had an attic bedroom to himself, and took his meals with Forrest and his wife. Mrs. Forrest was a peaceful and contented little woman, with a profound admiration for her husband. She was very kind to Gronow, looked after his comfort and kept his clothes in order. Gronow, in return,

was ready to render her any little service, for he never liked to be under an obligation to anyone.

In this way six months passed quickly and pleasantly. Gronow was in the full swing of his work, and made good progress in everything he undertook. True to his promise, he wrote to Noel every week, and he carefully treasured the little packet of letters, in a large, round hand, which he received from time to time. They were the only letters he ever received, he had no other correspondents.

Forrest was an ardent socialist, and Gronow heard a great deal of talk about class distinctions and the curse of caste, which was all so much Greek to him. He once went to a socialist meeting, but came away no wiser than he went. He asked Mrs. Forrest what she thought about it all.

'Oh, it is all right!' she replied, with a peaceful smile; 'they talk a lot, and let off the steam. It does them good, and no one else any harm.'

Gronow did not conceive that the subject concerned him in any way, but before long he saw reason to change his mind.

Mrs. Forrest had observed the pleasure with which he received Noel's letters, and had been interested in what he told her about his little friend. So when he came in from work one evening, about six months after he first came to them, she said to him with a kindly smile, 'There is a letter from your little friend again; I put it on the table in your room.'

'Already!' said Gronow, smiling too, for it was not very long since Noel's last letter had reached him. He went upstairs whistling, not a usual exercise with him, found the letter on his table, and sat down on the end of his bed to read it:

'My dear, dear Gronow,

'There is a lady called Miss Lanyon, she came to the orfanage, she wanted to addopt a child, so she took me. She lives at Brighton, and I live there too, now. She has a very big house, and a lot of servants, she gives me nice clothes and things, my name is Noel Lanyon now. I told

her about you, and said you were awfully good, but she said we cannot be friends any more, because I am going to be a Gentleman. She said I must rite and tell you I shall allways remember you, and be greatfull to you.

'Can't you grow a Gentleman too, becos then she would let us be friends again? It is very nice here, but I am very sorry we can't be friends.

'Goodby from

' Your unhappy little friend,

' NOEL LANYON.'

If Noel had suddenly appeared before him, and with his little fist had knocked him flat down, Gronow could not have been more utterly thunderstruck. At first he could hardly take in what had happened, and when, after some reflection, he did comprehend it, for the first time in his life he swore a round oath.

Not at Noel. He never thought for a moment of being angry with him. He was only a child, and could not help himself. But he cursed Miss Lanyon for a heartless, stuck-up aristocrat, he cursed class distinctions and high society generally, he cursed the ingratitude of mankind, and then he pulled himself up, and called himself a fool.

Should he continue to write to Noel, in the face of Miss Lanyon's dictum? Of what use, since she would not allow Noel to write to him? And what likelihood was there that they would ever meet again? Except it were by the merest chance, none at all.

One thing was evident: his dream of a little home for himself and Noel had vanished into thin air. After the grand home he had now, Noel would despise anything so humble, even if he had the choice, which he never would have.

Gronow felt very bitter indeed. He had devoted himself to Noel, and was certain that he had attached the boy to him for life. With his tendency to concentrate his imagination on one idea, he had never conceived of such a thing as life entirely without Noel; he had never supposed for a moment that Noel could learn to depend on anyone else as he had

depended on him. He felt as if he had built a house and one half of it had fallen down. He could not console himself with the thought that Noel was much better off where he was. Perhaps his nature was not generous enough for that; in any case, he did not believe that luxuries were necessary for anyone's happiness, and he was honestly convinced that he could have made Noel quite as happy as Miss Lanyon could do.

What else was left for him? Noel's pitiful little query, 'Can't you grow a gentleman too?' recurred to him, fraught with unconscious irony. Yes; he intended to 'grow a gentleman too,' but not the kind of gentleman that Noel would be. Gronow would be a working man, however much a gentleman, all his days. And this stony-hearted, rich old lady would, no doubt, leave Noel all her money, so that he could lead an idle life, and look down on those who work with their head and their hands. He, Gronow, would never mix in the society that Noel would belong to, and by the time he had 'grown a gentleman' Noel would have completely forgotten him.

He pondered much over the question whether he should answer this letter of Noel's or not; but he finally decided that it was useless. Since Noel had to forget him, and certainly would forget him in time, the sooner he did so the better. They were irrevocably separated, as it appeared, and it was most unlikely that they would ever come together again. It was the first time that Gronow had felt himself powerless against circumstances, and he did not like to own it, even to himself.

'If I am not master of Noel's circumstances, I am master of my own,' he said to himself. 'It shall not be in Miss Lanyon's power, or in anyone's power, to upset me, or turn me aside, or make me miserable. I have my work and my ambition, and I can be independent of everyone.'

The next time Forrest began on the socialistic theme Gronow suddenly burst out, and told him that it was no good; class distinctions in England were too firmly rooted to be blown down by any wind of socialistic doctrine.

'What's up with you now?' asked Forrest, staring at him.

With some hesitation and effort, Gronow overcame his natural reticence and told him.

'What a shame!' exclaimed Mrs. Forrest, sympathetically.

'It is another proof of what I am always saying,' remarked her husband. 'The curse of class distinction has come home to you now.'

This experience hardened Gronow. He did his best to put Noel out of his thoughts, as he had passed out of his life, and to absorb himself completely in his ambition and his pursuit of knowledge. And yet he did not forget Noel, nor ever would, for with him, as with some others of us, forgetfulness was impossible. Reason and common sense showed him that his early plan of life with Noel was impracticable; Noel was transplanted to a sphere much more suitable to his development; and as it was a sphere to which Gronow would never have, nor ever wish to have access, their separation seemed inevitable.

Gronow reasoned and acted thus, but for all that he had not forgotten; hard and unboyishly austere as he was in most things, he was often tender to the weak for Noel's sake.

Years of hard work and unvarying routine pass very quickly, even in youth, when time is long; and so passed the next five years for Gronow. They were years of steady progress and achievement; but they were marked by only two incidents which need to be recorded here. The first occurred when he was about seventeen years old.

The waterpipes at a certain workhouse needed repairs. Two or three men, Gronow being one of them, were sent from Trents' workshop to attend to them. Gronow went up to one of the wards to examine a tap, and while he was at work upon it, two or three of the workhouse inmates hung round watching him. One of these attracted Gronow's attention. He had been a tall, powerful man, but now, though not old, he was stooping and shrunken, a wreck of his former self. Something in his face seemed familiar to Gronow, and when the man moved away, he inquired of the others who he was.

'He's a Swedish fellow called Neilson,' one of them told him; 'it's drink that has brought him to this.'

Gronow asked a few more questions, the answers to which sufficed to convince him that the man was his father.

Going home that evening from his work, Gronow turned it over in his mind—ought he to take his father out of the workhouse, and look after him?

Gronow was earning good wages now, and with a little economy and self-denial he could have kept a home for himself and his father, though he could not have laid by money as he was now doing. He did not feel, however, that it was incumbent on him to make this sacrifice. The man was his father, and that was all that could be said. Beyond the fact that he had brought him into the world, he had absolutely no claim on him. He had ill-treated him in early childhood; he had been the cause of his mother's premature death; he had given him away, without remorse, into the hands of strangers.

'Besides that,' thought Gronow, 'I could not look after him properly; I should have to be out at work all day, and the old man would only wander about and get drunk.'

Contrary to his usual custom, he mentioned the matter to Forrest, and asked his opinion.

'You are certain it is your father?' asked Forrest.

'Quite certain.'

'And you don't think yourself that you are bound to look after him?'

'No, I don't,' replied Gronow. 'He has never been a father to me, why should I be a son to him? He is not likely to live long, and the workhouse people can look after him better than I can.'

'He did not recognise you?'

'No, that would hardly have been possible.'

'And you did not tell him who you were?'

'No, there was no object in it.'

'You would be ashamed of him, I suppose?'

'Oh no, why should I be ashamed, as long as I have done nothing myself to be ashamed of? But I don't see that he has any real claim upon me.'

Forrest looked at him curiously. ' You are wonderfully hard-headed for a youngster, Neilson,' he remarked.

' Do you think I am wrong ? ' asked Gronow.

' Oh no, not *wrong*, ' answered Forrest, ' but still——' he went out of the room without finishing his sentence.

Some months afterwards Gronow was passing the workhouse, and it occurred to him to go in and inquire after his father. He had died, they told him, three weeks before.

Shortly after this there came to Gronow one of those fateful moments which sometimes pass us by, swift and unheeded. Sometimes we recognise the lost opportunity after it is gone, at other times we never recognise it at all ; and it is happier for us in the last case than in the first.

It was a blusterous March evening, and Gronow came later than usual out of the workshop. The air was clear and sharp ; a cold breeze swept the streets, hustling foot-passengers round corners, and catching at skirts and veils with sudden gusts. A shower of sleet had just fallen, and the glimmer of lamps was flashed back from wet pavements and road-side puddles. Ragged fragments of cloud raced overhead before the wind, leaving clear pale patches of sky, where dim stars began to twinkle through.

Gronow strode along rapidly, enjoying the cool, fresh wind against his cheek. When he reached Blackfriars Bridge, which was his usual route across the river, his way was blocked by a small crowd which had gathered on the footway. As a rule, Gronow passed these street-corner crowds with indifference, but, having to make his way through this one, he perceived the object of their attention, and paused.

It was a boy, about ten or eleven years of age, dressed like a gentleman's son, splashed with mud from head to foot, and, in spite of the dignity of an Eton jacket and bowler hat, sobbing uncontrollably. Around him were gathered several youths of that most objectionable type that supplies the loafers and idlers of the London streets, who have no other occupation, apparently, in life but to form crowds around any object of interest—from a dead

horse to a regiment of soldiers. Gronow pushed some of them aside, and said to the boy in their midst :

' What is the matter ? Are you hurt ? '

The child was crying too much to answer, but several willing voices took up the tale.

' The poor cove has lost hisself.'

' He have been in the gutter, pickin' up mud.'

' He wants his mother.' And so on.

Gronow felt some contempt for big boys who cried, but he was sorry for this lad, who seemed quite bewildered and helpless. He walked away a few steps and looked about him, saw a hansom cab and hailed it, and when it drove up, took the boy by the arm, drew him through the crowd, which gave way at once, and put him into the cab.

' Where do you live ? ' he asked.

The boy's sobs began to subside.

' 13 Hyde Park Terrace,' he said in a choked whisper ; ' but I haven't any money.'

' All right,' said Gronow shortly, as he took some loose silver out of his pocket. He paid the cabman, giving him the address, the cab drove off, and Gronow went on his way, not having recognised Noel—for Noel it was, and he was equally unconscious that his rescuer was Gronow. Perhaps, in any case, they would not have known each other, even had the growing darkness not hidden their features, for in four years both had changed a good deal.

Noel's dilemma was easily explained. Miss Lanyon had taken a house in London for the spring, and Noel, whose school had broken up before Easter on account of an epidemic of measles, was with her. He was not allowed to go out alone in London, but on this afternoon, Miss Lanyon being laid up with one of her bad headaches, he had slipped away, and had ridden a long way in an omnibus, right into the City in fact. When he got out of the omnibus the noise and bustle confused and frightened him. He did not know which way to go, and wandered about until it began to get late. Then, to his utter dismay, he discovered that his watch and his purse had been stolen from him, and, as a climax to his misfortunes, a heavy

shower came on, and a passing vehicle splashed him with mud from head to foot. He took shelter in a doorway from the rain, whence emerging in a very dejected frame of mind, he asked advice and assistance from one of the ill-conditioned youths afore mentioned, who immediately summoned his comrades to enjoy the fun. Their derision and his sense of utter helplessness completely broke down poor Noel, who was at best a timid and rather helpless child.

Of course he would soon have found some one to compassionate him, probably a policeman ; but Gronow happened to be the first good Samaritan that passed that way ; and thus Fate jostled these two together, and, in her characteristically capricious manner, separated them again, all unknowing.

If she intended ever to bring them together, it was evidently not then, nor thus.

## CHAPTER IV

‘But who could have expected this  
 When we two drew together first,  
 Just for the obvious human bliss,  
 To satisfy life’s daily thirst  
 With a thing men seldom miss ?’

ONE evening, Gronow, coming home to supper, found that the Forrests had guests. With all his socialistic theories, with a not uncommon inconsistency, Forrest was exclusive in his choice of acquaintances. He lived on friendly terms with his neighbours, and was always ready to do a kindness; but Mrs. Forrest was no gossip, she went out very little, they had few visitors, and those few were well known to Gronow.

These two, however, were strangers to him. The one was a girl about his own age, the other a little girl of eight or nine years.

‘This is Miss Deane,’ said Mrs. Forrest, introducing them; ‘her mother was at school with me. This is Mr. Neilson, Alice, who has lived with us a long time now, and this is Nora,’ drawing forward the little girl, who looked up at Gronow, and gave him her hand without shyness.

Gronow looked straight into a pair of blue-grey eyes under a broad white forehead, and heard a pleasant, quiet voice that responded to his greeting. No one would have called Alice Deane pretty, her features were too irregular, but Gronow was instantly struck by her refinement of manner. The few girls whom he had known hitherto were not ladies, and though he was always polite to them, he did not care for their society. He had none of the small talk and perpetual chaff at his command which was their chief method of communication with a young man, consequently he was not a favourite with them. From whatever cause, this girl was superior to her apparent position in life; for

he presently gathered from the conversation that she was a dressmaker.

Seated opposite to her at the table, he studied her face with occasional glances. He did not know what it was that attracted him, for it was not beauty, either of feature or colouring. Perhaps the chief characteristic of her face was that it was particularly grave in repose, and particularly animated when she spoke or smiled—a sign of an excitable nature.

The child was a complete contrast to her; a sturdy, merry, audacious youngster, with a fluff of flaxen hair standing out round her pink cheeks, blue eyes like a doll's, and two rows of perfect teeth, which were very much in evidence. If these two were sisters, they were not at all alike.

Mrs. Forrest explained to Gronow that she and Alice had met quite accidentally that day in a shop. Alice had come only recently to live in this neighbourhood, and proved to be the daughter of an old schoolfellow, of whom Mrs. Forrest had lost sight for many years past, and who was now dead. Not very long since, Gronow supposed, observing that both girls were dressed in black.

'It is so nice to meet with old friends again,' Mrs. Forrest said, with her contented smile, 'or the children of old friends—they are quite different from new acquaintances.'

'Old friends must be new at some time,' remarked Alice.

'Yes, when you are young that is all right,' put in Forrest; 'youth is the time for making friends.' Was it accidental that, as he said this, Alice, looking across the table, met a steady glance from Gronow's bright brown eyes, behind their glasses? There was something companionable in the glance, and she returned it frankly, with the inward comment, what a clever, thoughtful-looking young fellow that is! At the same time she replied to Forrest:

'Still, I agree with Mrs. Forrest it is very nice to meet your parents' friends. They are willing to take you on trust, without knowing you.'

'We may safely do that in Miss Deane's case,' said Forrest gallantly.

The compliment was obvious, and Gronow wished he

had been quick enough to pay it. He noticed that Miss Deane did not blush and giggle affectedly, as would most of the girls he knew. She only smiled and said frankly:

'Thank you, Mr. Forrest. I shall have to be very careful to keep up my character after that.'

The conversation was brisk and lively during supper, and Gronow, generally so silent, found himself taking much more part in it than usual. Nora, who was not at all shy, and had very old-fashioned ways, raised a hearty laugh now and then with her quaint remarks. Gronow, who had never taken a special fancy to any child since he lost Noel, began to talk to her and draw her out, which was not difficult.

The time passed quickly. It was already a quarter to eight when Forrest rose, and said he must go out. He had a sort of night-school, which he held twice a week—a class of boys of the roughest and most hopeless type, with whom he had wonderful influence.

'I must be going, too,' said Alice, looking at the clock; 'it is getting late for Nora to be out. She catches cold rather easily.'

'Do our ways lie together?' asked Forrest.

'I am afraid not,' began Mrs. Forrest, but Gronow put in promptly :

'I will walk home with Miss Deane.'

He had a new book on Physics, and, having no engagement that evening, had promised himself two or three hours' steady reading. Had Miss Deane been any other girl he would, no doubt, have offered to escort her home, however reluctantly; but now he felt no reluctance, only a desire to prolong the pleasant new sensations which the last hour had awakened in him. A few minutes later they were out in the dark, quiet street together, Nora skipping along between them, and holding a hand of each. Gronow clasped the little warm hand, and thought of Noel. It seemed quite natural to him to be leading a child again.

'Where is your house, Miss Deane?' he asked.

'No. 9 Beresford Street—do you know it?'

'Oh yes, I know all the streets about here; that is a nice quiet part.'

'Yes, I think so. It is rather near the river, and the houses are old, and rather damp, I sometimes fear.'

'That may be,' replied Gronow, 'and do you two live alone there?'

'Oh no!' said Alice; 'we live with my stepfather, Mr. Lester—Nora's father,' she added; 'my mother married a second time, and Nora is my half-sister.'

'I am your very own sister,' contradicted Nora promptly.

'It is all the same,' agreed Alice, and she smiled across at Gronow, who returned the smile.

'You have lost both your parents, then?' he said gently.

'Yes, mother died two years ago,' she replied, 'and my father I can hardly remember. He was a sea captain, and was nearly always away from home, and I was only seven years old when he was drowned. But Mr. Lester has always been very good to me,' she added quickly.

'You have to work for your living, however?' Gronow ventured to say, and feared she might take it as an impertinence; but she replied without a shadow of offence:

'Oh, I prefer to do that! I do not work so very hard, and I should not like to be entirely dependent on him. It is not as if I were his own daughter.'

'It is much better to depend on oneself, certainly,' agreed Gronow.

'And now tell me something about yourself,' said Alice in a friendly manner. 'You make your home always with the Forrests?'

'I have no other,' he replied. 'I was brought up in an orphanage from seven years old till I was fourteen, and then I was placed where I am now. That is all my history.'

'That must be rather dreary, to have no people of your own,' Alice observed sympathetically, 'and an institution must be a very poor substitute for a home, although, of course, it is a splendid thing to have such places.'

She spoke rather questioningly, and Gronow replied to her thought.

'I certainly do not think,' he said, 'that an institution is an ideal place for bringing up children. I do not even think that it is always better than a bad home, though few

people would agree with me there ; but of course it is much better than no home at all. I am very grateful to the institution that brought me up, although I do not believe that if I had stayed with my father I should have gone to the bad.'

Even since Gronow had his first rise in wages he had conscientiously laid by a few shillings every year, and sent them anonymously as a subscription to the orphanage where he had spent seven years of his life.

' But was your father still living when you were put in the orphanage ? ' asked Alice in surprise.

' Yes, but he was glad to get rid of me,' said Gronow.

' That was very sad,' murmured Alice, ' and is he alive now ? '

' No, he died about two years ago,' said Gronow, suddenly relapsing into his most reserved manner. He did not intend it, but Alice felt herself silenced, and blamed herself for having been indiscreet in her questions. She felt uncomfortable, and was glad that they were near home. Gronow meanwhile was remembering that Forrest had thought him unfeeling for leaving his father to die in the workhouse ; he wondered whether Miss Deane would think so too, but felt himself too much of a stranger to her to ask her. And why, indeed, should it matter to him at all what she thought ?

' Here is the house,' said Alice, and her voice broke in suddenly upon his reflections ; he was sorry the walk was at an end, and had a vague sense of having lost an opportunity. Alice thought that he was offended with her, but she did not like to ask him straightforwardly if he were ; woman-like, she had quickly devised another way of finding out.

' Won't you come in for a few minutes ? ' she asked him rather shyly ; ' Mr. Lester is at home this evening, and he would be very pleased to see you.'

Gronow hesitated a moment, and he who hesitates is lost ; he accepted and went in.

The house was a small one ; it was old, and in some respects inconvenient ; but, such as it was, they had it to themselves, not even keeping a servant. There was a narrow entrance passage with two doors on the right side.

Alice opened the first of these and ushered Gronow into a room strongly flavoured with tobacco, but tobacco of good quality nevertheless.

The room was by no means cheerless. A fire burned in the grate, for it was already late autumn, and down by the river the evenings were chill. A lamp, with a tin reflector, hanging from the ceiling, gave quite a brilliant light. There was no carpet, but the floor was stained dark and polished, and a handsome skin rug lay on the hearth. A pair of oriental-looking curtains were drawn across the window, and the walls were adorned with one or two pairs of horns, some quaint, dark pictures, and some outlandish-looking weapons. Gronow guessed rightly that Alice's own father, the sea-captain, had brought home these curiosities from some of his voyages.

At present, however, his attention was engrossed by the only occupant of the room—a tall, strikingly good-looking man of about five-and-forty, who lay back in an easy chair by the fire, reading and smoking. As the three young people entered he removed his pipe, let fall his eyeglasses, and said, in a soft, melodious voice, ‘Well, my girls, have you had a pleasant evening? Yes? That’s right. And brought a visitor with you; that is right, too. Pleased to see you, sir.’ Alice introduced Gronow, and Mr. Lester rose and shook hands with him.

‘Sit down, Mr. Neilson; you will find that a comfortable chair. Won’t you come near the fire? The evenings grow chilly now.’

‘Thank you, I am warm with walking,’ replied Gronow, who found the air of the room somewhat oppressive.

‘Can I offer you a cigar?’ Mr. Lester asked next.

‘Thank you, I don’t smoke.’

‘Ah! then you don’t drink either?’

‘No.’

‘That is a good thing, Mr. Neilson, for I have nothing of that description to offer you. I am a phenomenon, for although I smoke perpetually, I drink milk and water. You disapprove of all these indulgences, I suppose; I don’t mean milk and water, but tobacco and alcohol?’

'I cannot afford them,' replied Gronow simply.

'Which means that you do not choose to afford them,' said his host, smiling. 'Well, it does one good to hear a young fellow say that. It is very kind of you to escort my girls home, Mr. Neilson. I expect you are thinking, as I am, that I ought to have gone to fetch them; and so I ought, but I was busy writing and did not mark the time.'

Gronow had observed a table littered with papers, and he hazarded the query :

'You are a journalist, then, I suppose?'

'In a humble way, yes,' replied Mr. Lester, 'and a writer of pot-boilers generally. What is your profession?'

'I am a mechanic; I work for Trent Brothers.'

'Ah! then most likely you can tell me exactly what I want to know,' exclaimed Mr. Lester, suddenly jumping up and going to the paper-bestrewn table; 'it is just a little question of practical engineering, requiring more technical knowledge than I possess.'

He returned with a pamphlet in his hand, and in another minute he and Gronow were deep in a discussion which proved equally interesting to both of them. Gronow was well able to explain the question in point, and that led on to a conversation in which Mr. Lester was struck by Gronow's accurate information and superior ability, while Gronow, on his part, perceived that here was a man of many talents and wide and varied knowledge.

They were still talking when Alice, who had gone away some time before to put Nora to bed, re-entered the room carrying a tray with three steaming cups of coffee on it.

'What an agreeable sight!' said Mr. Lester, nodding at his step-daughter. 'I was not joking, Mr. Neilson, when I told you that I drank milk and water, for that is really my usual beverage. This coffee is in honour of the guest.'

'I am sorry that Miss Deane should have troubled on my account,' said Gronow.

'It was no trouble,' replied Alice; 'besides, to say the truth, I made it partly because I felt inclined for it myself. I hope you like coffee, Mr. Neilson?'

'Yes, that is one of the indulgences I allow myself,' returned Gronow, smiling at her; 'no sugar, thank you.'

'And I don't know anyone that makes better coffee than Alice,' observed Mr. Lester, sipping his appreciatively.

'You can make it quite as well yourself,' said Alice, 'you have made many a cup for me.'

'So I have,' he replied, and patted her hand affectionately. 'What have you done with Nora? Is she gone to bed?'

'Yes, and fast asleep already,' replied Alice.

'Why, it is ten o'clock!' exclaimed Gronow, as a little travelling clock on the mantelshelf struck the hour in deliberate and melodious tones. 'I had no idea it was so late; I must be going.'

'You have to rise early, I suppose?' observed Mr. Lester, holding out his hand; 'so does Alice, but I keep shockingly late hours. Well, good evening, Mr. Neilson; I shall be very glad to see you any evening when I am at home, and you feel inclined to drop in for a chat.'

Gronow walked home under the misty sky with a strange feeling of exaltation. He recalled every incident of the evening, from the moment that he was introduced to Alice at Mrs. Forrest's table, to the moment, just past, when he had taken her hand at parting. He seemed to feel the touch of it still, and to see the quick upward glance from her blue-grey eyes into his. He had never cared to look into any girl's eyes before. He recalled, too, the keen interest of his conversation with Mr. Lester, the sharpening of iron against iron, so thoroughly enjoyable where two intellects above the average come into friendly contact. He was agreeably conscious that he had been associating on equal terms with people who were really his superiors, though they apparently did not think so; and he knew, and was proud to know it, that he was able, by the exercise of his own powers, to raise himself to their level, or above it.

That Mr. Lester was a gentleman, both by birth and education, was unmistakable; and Gronow wondered much how the man, with all his talents, came to be in

such an inferior position, and so poor as he must be, to live in such a manner. It was generally drink that brought a man down like that; but Mr. Lester, if his own account was to be believed, did not drink, nor did he look like a man who had ever given way to drink. There must be some other cause, and Gronow was still pondering the question when he reached home, and found the Forrests sitting up and expecting him. They had easily guessed where he was, and Mrs. Forrest was much interested in hearing his account of Alice's home, and of Mr. Lester, whom she had never seen. When Gronow described him, she and her husband quite shared his wonder at the comparatively miserable condition of so able a man.

' You do not think he drinks ? ' asked Forrest.

' I feel almost certain he does not,' replied Gronow.

' If he did, it would not be at all fit for those two girls to live with him,' observed Mrs. Forrest with some anxiety.

' Still, the little one is his own daughter,' said Forrest ; ' the elder one could not take her away against his wish, and would not, of course, leave her.'

' But I do not think it is drink,' repeated Gronow, ' and he seems to be a very kind father. Miss Deane, in fact, said as much.'

' Alice is a very nice girl,' said Mrs. Forrest emphatically, ' though she is not like her mother. She must take after her father, I fancy, but I only saw him once.'

' As they live near you can keep an eye on them,' remarked Forrest.

' I will do so,' said his wife. ' Alice must be rather lonely, and I don't fancy she will make many friends about here.'

' Why have they come to live here ? ' asked Gronow.

' Because it is cheap, and respectable at the same time. The rents of those old houses in Beresford Street are very low, but then the houses are dilapidated. I expect they will be pulling them down before long.'

Gronow went to his room, and his eye fell upon the new book which lay unopened on his table. No matter, he had been quite as well employed, he said to himself.

And yet, was it so after all? Had he really had much profit out of his evening? He had looked into a girl's eyes, and they haunted him; but she was a girl far above him, not in worldly position, perhaps, but in everything else, at present. If he began to think about her too much it would distract him from that steady upward course on which his mind was bent.

'And a lot of it is just vanity,' he told himself, as he lay down. 'I have been showing off before my betters, and getting blown up with my own conceit, that's all about it.'

Before he went to sleep that night, Gronow had made up his mind that the society of Alice Deane was one of the indulgences which decidedly he must not allow himself.

## CHAPTER V

'Alas ! where now doth scorn of fortune hide ?  
And where the heart that still must conqueror be ?'

'Dame Fortune now is mistress of my soul,  
And this my heart that I would fain-control  
Is grown the thrall of many a fear and sigh.'

FOR the next two or three weeks Gronow's resolution was put to no severe test, for he scarcely saw Miss Deane, and he did not go to her house. He heard of her, however, frequently, from Mrs. Forrest, who took a motherly interest in the two girls, and often went to see them.

Of Mr. Lester, when she made his acquaintance, Mrs. Forrest on the whole disapproved.

'He may be very clever, and I won't deny that he has charming manners,' she admitted, 'but I wouldn't trust him any farther than I could see him, nor as far. There's something wrong with him, for he's out every night almost, neglecting his work. I asked Alice straight out if he always came home sober, and she assured me that he never touches drink. Yet I don't believe he goes out for any good.'

'What do they live on ?' asked Forrest.

'I suppose he does earn something by his writing,' replied his wife, 'but I should think he spends most of that on himself, for he dresses uncommonly well, and smokes expensive cigars. Alice has a little money of her own, that her father left her, and she helps it out with needlework. Still, they don't seem to be really hard up; and as for Nora, I must say the child has nice clothes, and goes to a private school.'

'Oh, they are better off than a great many !' observed Forrest, 'and if Lester is kind to them, as it seems he is, they have not much to complain of.'

'Yet Alice is often anxious, I can see,' said Mrs. Forrest

thoughtfully ; 'she ought not to have those lines on her forehead at twenty.'

'I expect she is one of the anxious sort,' replied her husband.

This conversation took place at the table, Gronow being a silent but interested auditor. He looked at himself in the glass that night, a thing he seldom did. He was twenty now, but there were no lines on his forehead, except the little frown of thought between his brows..

'Women do worry themselves about things more than men,' he reflected, 'and I am not the worrying sort, anyway I don't see the use of it.'

It seemed still less useful to trouble about the lines on Miss Deane's forehead. Yet he remembered that he had noticed them, and had wondered what brought them there.

It was on a Saturday morning shortly after this that Gronow was informed by one of his mates that someone wanted to speak to him in the office. He went there accordingly, and found, to his surprise, Mr. Lester.

'Good morning, Mr. Neilson. Excuse me for interrupting a busy man, but I was not sure when and where else I should find you.'

'I am quite at your service, Mr. Lester.'

'Then I will not detain you a minute,' and Lester proceeded to explain the object of his visit. He wished Gronow to co-operate with him in the composition of a series of articles that he had undertaken to write for a popular scientific journal ; in consideration, of course, of a share of the remuneration.

'I have never tried my hand at writing,' said Gronow. 'I don't know if I could give you any help worth having and paying for.'

'The actual literary work could be mine, if you do not feel inclined for it,' rejoined Lester ; 'what I want from you is ideas, and accuracy of detail in the information given.'

Gronow thereupon agreed, and once he had done so, the project interested him. They began work the same evening in Mr. Lester's room.

And therewith Gronow entered upon a new phase of

existence. For the first time in his life he had an intellectual companion. Gronow had a really powerful intellect, and in that respect neither Forrest nor any of his work-fellows were his equals. Nor was Lester his equal in perseverance and power of application ; but the versatility of his talents and his wide range of information constantly astonished Gronow and excited his envy.

Lester was master of seven languages, and had more than a superficial acquaintance with several others ; he had read, as it seemed, everything, and remembered everything he had read. He could quote from memory page after page of all his favourite authors, whether in prose or poetry. He was never at a loss for a quotation, and always knew where to find it. A more interesting and delightful companion no one could desire. To Gronow he was a revelation. Why was the man such a failure ? Was it only because he had never devoted himself to the pursuit of one particular object or profession ? Or was there some fatal flaw in his character which had not yet come to light ? Gronow inclined to the latter opinion.

But it was not only Lester's society that had created the new epoch in Gronow's life. That, undoubtedly, was an intellectual treat, and an education ; but it was not for that only that Gronow looked forward so eagerly to the evenings in Beresford Street. He found himself counting on certain glances which shone out of a pair of eyes that were wonderfully attractive to look into ; he found himself listening for the quiet tones of a voice that seemed to him to have a different music in it from any other voice that he had ever heard.

After Nora was in bed Alice always made coffee for the two gentlemen and brought it to them, and after that she sometimes sat quietly in the room with her sewing. One evening, to Gronow's surprise, Lester appealed to her for an opinion on the question they were discussing, and she entered into it with an intelligent interest which gave Gronow a new respect for her. He had always looked upon women as housekeepers.

Of course it was not every evening that Gronow went to

Beresford Street. He himself had other engagements, and Lester was often out, though on what business remained a mystery. On Sundays, however, he was always at home, and they began work early.

It was on a Sunday evening that Gronow, observing that Alice was very silent and abstracted, said to her, when Mr. Lester was out of the room for a few minutes :

' You are very grave to-night, Miss Deane. Perhaps you do not approve of our doing this work on Sunday ? '

' It is not that,' she replied at once. ' I think it is far better to work on Sundays than to spend the time badly.'

' Do you think I spend my time badly when I am not here ? ' he asked smiling.

' You ? oh no,' she answered, also smiling. ' I should say, from what Mrs. Forrest tells me, that you spend your time too well. You should have more recreation.'

' I do not need it,' said Gronow, wondering what else Mrs. Forrest might have said to Alice about him.

' Everyone needs it. It is a mistake to be always at work. You should learn a musical instrument, or read novels.'

' I am not musical ; and the only novel I ever read seemed to me great nonsense. Why should people want novels when they have real life ? '

' You are terribly practical,' said Alice, laughing outright, and looking straight at him with eyes full of fun.

Gronow returned the look with equal directness, and equal enjoyment, but Mr. Lester's entrance at that moment brought the conversation to an end.

Two or three weeks passed thus, and then something happened. What it was Gronow did not know at the time, but he observed that Mr. Lester was very much at home, indeed he had reason to believe that he never stirred out of his house for about a fortnight, an unprecedented occurrence. The scientific articles made good progress, but Alice looked pale and unhappy.

Gronow was so reticent and slow of speech that he found it very difficult ever to approach to a confidence with anyone, most of all with Alice.

Nevertheless, he was bringing all the force of his native determination to bear upon his desire to know the cause of her trouble and to help her, when Forrest, coming in one evening from his night-school, said to his wife, Gronow being present :

' I have heard something to-night which it is as well you should both know. It will not go any further. About a fortnight ago the police made a raid on a gambling-house in this neighbourhood, kept by a man named Pritchard. Lester was there, and jumped out of a back window. He was not recognised, but he has thought it well to keep himself in seclusion since, in his own house—I should rather say in Miss Deane's house, for it is taken in her name, and she pays the rent. I know the landlord. Lester is an inveterate gambler. Sometimes he has plenty of money, more often he is without a penny. Except for this, he does not bear a bad character.'

' That is quite enough,' said Mrs. Forrest ; ' poor Alice, I expect she has to keep the whole household ! '

She spoke with indignation, and Gronow shared it.

He felt quite a repugnance to Lester for the time, and would have gone with reluctance to keep his next appointment with him, had it not been for his wish to see Alice.

Fortune favoured him, however. Alice opened the door to him.

' I am so sorry,' she said, with a troubled face, ' Mr. Lester is gone out. He left a message to ask if you would come to-morrow evening instead ; but I told him he ought not to waste your time like that.'

' And was he angry with you ? ' asked Gronow.

' Oh no, he is hardly ever angry ! He takes things much too lightly,' she replied with rather a sad smile.

The proper thing for Gronow to do now, seeing that Alice was alone, was to say good-night and retire ; but Gronow was not acquainted with Mrs. Grundy, and would not have troubled himself to observe her rules if he had been. He therefore walked straight into the house and into the sitting-room, where he was now a familiar guest. Alice closed the door and followed, rather puzzled and rather shy.

Gronow went straight to his point. He knew no other way of expressing himself.

'Miss Deane,' he said earnestly, 'I wish you would tell me your trouble, so that I could help you. I know something about it. Forrest heard about the raid on Pritchard's house, but you need not fear that either he or I will ever let fall a word to anyone else. Cannot anything be done to place Mr. Lester in a better position? Would nothing induce him to give up—gambling?'

Alice had flushed and turned pale again while Gronow spoke, but as he ended she raised her eyes to his, and he read in them that she was not offended with him. She shook her head, however, in answer to his question.

'I am afraid not,' she said sadly. 'Mother tried very hard to make him give it up: he was really fond of her, and I think he did try for a time, but he always went back to it. It is like a disease.'

'It is a disease,' replied Gronow. 'But all this is rather hard on you.'

'I should not have stayed with him after mother died,' Alice continued, 'although he has never been unkind to me—if it had not been for Nora. Mother was so anxious about Nora, and she left her in my charge.'

'Nora is not at all like her father,' Gronow observed.

'No; she is like mother,' replied Alice; 'and that is why I often feel anxious about her, too. Although she looks so fat and rosy, she is not strong in the chest. And mother died of consumption.'

'You must not take trouble by the forelock,' said Gronow.

'No, of course not; and it is my fault to be over-anxious. But I do feel Nora a great responsibility, and she has no one but me to look after her.'

Nora's father evidently did not count.

There was a pause, during which both the young people were thinking busily. Alice was wondering how far it was right for her to place confidence in a young man of whom she really knew very little, though all she did know was in his favour. There was something very reliable about Gronow, as there often is about those who say little. The inference is

that they do not repeat what they hear. Gronow's thoughts were very different. He wanted to find out if Lester was living on Alice, or if he had any other source of income than gambling and intermittent literary work; but he was in doubt how to put the question without being impertinent. At length he said :

'Has Mr. Lester never had any regular profession ?'

'I hardly know,' Alice replied ; 'but from his own account, I should think he has always been desultory and unreliable. His family were well off, I believe ; and you can see he has had a good education. He was a good many years in South Africa, and at one time he made a lot of money at the Diamond Fields at Kimberley.'

'And did he gamble that away ?'

'Yes ; he used to play a great deal with a young man named Dupleix, of whom he always speaks very bitterly. Dupleix got every penny of his money, but it was by cheating—he did not play fair.'

'Does it make much difference ?' asked Gronow.

'Yes, I think so,' replied Alice. 'Of course, I know what you mean, and I quite agree with you that all gambling is dishonest ; but Mr. Lester would never think of using marked cards, or shirking his debts of honour, as they are called. This man Dupleix seems to have had no sense of honour. Mr. Lester says if he had lost the money in fair play he would never have complained, because he took his chance, and would have had only himself to blame. Any-way, he was ruined, and he has never really done any good for himself since.'

'How did your mother come to know him ?'

'Mother's brother was editor of a paper, and Mr. Lester wrote regularly for him at one time. Mother met him at her brother's house. They were great friends ; Mr. Lester is a very attractive man, you know.'

'Why did he leave South Africa ?'

'I think he just got disgusted with it after his mis-fortunes, and hoped he might do better at home.'

'And what became of Dupleix ?'

'I don't know. I think Mr. Lester quite lost sight of him.'

'I suppose he was a Frenchman?'

'The name sounds French; but I believe this man was English. His name was Christian.'

'Mr. Lester might make a good income by writing,' observed Gronow; 'as it is, I suppose he makes very little.'

'Not very much, I am afraid,' replied Alice. 'But I believe—at least, I am sure—that he has some other source of income besides his winnings at cards. He receives some money regularly from a firm of lawyers, so I suppose that is all right.'

'And does he not gamble that away, too?'

'Not now,' said Alice. 'I had to insist that he should spend that on Nora. It was very disagreeable; but after mother's death I had to tell him that I would not support Nora when it was his duty to do so. I said I would rather bring the matter into Court, and compel him to support her. Mr. Lester always gives in when he sees you really mean what you say.'

Gronow admired her firmness.

'That was quite right,' he said; 'it would be very wrong to let him impose upon you in any way.'

Alice coloured a little.

'Well, to be quite honest,' she said, 'I suppose he does impose on me somewhat, because his contributions to the housekeeping are irregular. You see, I won't take them unless it is money earned by work. I can't bear to touch the other money.'

'And he takes advantage of your scruples,' said Gronow.

'I do not see how to help it,' said Alice, 'except by trying to keep him regularly to work, and that is impossible.'

'The only other way would be not to have the scruples,' remarked Gronow.

'That is impossible too,' rejoined Alice quickly.

After this conversation, and the breaking down of the barrier of reserve between them, Gronow was obliged to own himself, for once, defeated. In hours of wakefulness, when Alice's face was outlined on the darkness, and Alice's eyes looked into his inmost soul, he told himself honestly that he had made a resolution and broken it—nay, that he

deliberately intended in future to break it. He could not keep away from Alice. She had taken him captive with a look and a word.

It was true that Gronow in many ways was hard : he was intensely practical, he was not sensitive or emotional ; but his passions were strong, and they were fresh and unused ; he had fallen headlong in love, without having had the slightest foreboding that such a catastrophe was in store for him. Looking back, he saw that he had loved Alice the first evening he met her ; looking forward, he knew that he should love her as long as he lived.

Where was now his solitary ambition, his independence of everyone but himself ? Suddenly merged in the passionate desire for a dual life, the passionate care for someone who was quite apart from all his schemes and dreams. Not that he had left marriage altogether out of his former plan of life. He had always supposed that he should marry some day, perhaps when he was thirty, or thereabouts, hardly sooner.

Now, however, he said to himself, that if he could win Alice he would make a home for her as soon as possible. It was not right that she should stay with that man, who simply lived upon her, with whom she had to battle for the money to support his own child. He would take her away from him. But if he could not win her ? And it seemed likely that she was a woman not to be lightly won.

When Gronow had been deprived of Noel's childish affection he had instantly resolved to live his life just the same without it—without any affection, if need be. Now it was different. If he failed to win Alice—and in this he could not count on success as he did in the paths of his ambition—he would certainly go on living and working with all the strength that was in him ; but it would be the resigned strength of a man who has lost a limb, and goes maimed all the days of his life.

The strong man armed had succumbed, not to a stronger man, but—to a woman with blue-grey eyes.

## CHAPTER VI

'Then we remarked upon the strangeness of that circumstance that friends came together in the beginning as if they were there for the first time, and yet each had been alive a good while, losing time with other people.'

THE year drew to a close, and a new one dawned under the auspices of a murky sky and a bleak north wind. Gronow steadily prosecuted his intimacy in Beresford Street, and this without difficulty, for Mr. Lester enjoyed his society, and when the scientific articles were finished found other pretexts for passing their spare evenings together.

Yet as far as his special object was concerned Gronow could not flatter himself that he made any progress. Alice was always friendly, but he was never alone with her, and there were no more confidences between them. His courting was therefore carried on chiefly through Nora, who had taken a great fancy to him, and to whom he could make love openly. Gronow knew that any of the other young fellows who were his daily associates would have adopted the simple and popular method of asking the girl to 'walk out' with him; but this method was quite out of the question for him. He knew that it was not the custom among the educated class to which he aspired to belong, and he felt instinctively that Alice not only would decline such a proposal, but would be repelled by receiving it from him.

He very frequently went to tea at Beresford Street on Sunday afternoons, and one afternoon in the end of January fortune favoured him. He went rather early and found Alice alone, Mr. Lester having taken Nora out for a walk.

'I think they will not be long,' Alice said to him; 'I hope not, for it is late and cold for Nora to be out.'

Nevertheless, Gronow privately hoped that they would be a little longer, and meanwhile he made himself quite at home.

On the writing-table stood something he had not seen before, a neatly-executed model of a schooner, in a glass case. Alice had evidently been dusting and cleaning it.

'That is very well made,' observed Gronow; 'what ship is it?'

'It was father's ship,' replied Alice; 'she was not very large, but he was so proud of her. He made this model himself once when he was at home for rather a long spell. Father was very clever with his fingers. Isn't it beautifully made?'

Gronow was interested, and took off the case to examine the model closely.

'It is all complete, every rope and spar,' Alice pointed out to him, 'even to the name painted on the side.'

'*Roumania!*' exclaimed Gronow. 'Is that the same that was wrecked near Falmouth some thirteen or fourteen years ago?'

'Yes,' answered Alice surprised, 'that was when father and all his mates were drowned. It was just thirteen years ago this last Christmas. Do you remember it?'

'Did you ever hear,' returned Gronow, 'that a little baby was washed ashore from that wreck alive?'

'Yes, I remember it perfectly,' she replied, 'because someone read it to us out of the newspaper, and it was the first thing that roused mother to any interest after the shock of hearing of the wreck.'

'That little baby,' continued Gronow, 'was eventually brought to the same orphanage where I was, and I looked after him all the time I was there.'

'Really!' exclaimed Alice, 'what a strange coincidence! And did you know who he was?'

'No. No one knew, and they were never able to find out. Did you know, by any chance?'

He asked rather eagerly, but Alice shook her head.

'Oh no, we never knew anything about it. Father would have known, of course, but you see he never came home to

tell us. It was odd that there should be a baby on board, for father never carried passengers as a rule.'

'That was why the name never transpired. If it was not a regular passenger boat,' said Gronow, 'your father probably obliged some poor people with a cheap passage.'

'And where is the boy now?' asked Alice.

Gronow hesitated. Noel's name had not passed his lips for years, and he was surprised to find how painful it was to him to recall those boyish memories. Alice's interested and sympathetic face, however, overcame his reluctance, and he told her the whole history, describing Noel, and dwelling on many incidents of his childhood.

When he came to the close he dwelt on it lightly, saying that, after he had left the orphanage, Noel had been adopted by a rich lady, who wished him to forget all his former associates, and therefore he had lost sight of him.

'But have you never tried to see him or hear of him since?' said Alice.

'No. Of what use was it, since she forbade it, and he would soon have forgotten me? Besides, he had migrated into a different sphere, where I could of course not follow him.'

'Still I think I should have tried,' persisted Alice, 'I could not have given him up all at once like that. It was not like you to give up so easily, Mr. Neilson.'

Gronow reflected.

'It was not that I did not care,' he said at length, 'but rather that I cared too much. I felt that if I had Noe I must have him on equal terms, as we had always been. I could not contemplate him from a distance. It was better to leave him altogether.'

'It was easier, perhaps,' replied Alice rather severely, 'but not better.'

'*Easier!*' said Gronow expressively.

'Yes, easier. You said just now you could not do the other thing, so I suppose you did what you could do—gave him up.'

'Still, I think I was right,' rejoined Gronow unmoved. 'I could hardly have forced myself into a wealthy house

where I was not wanted. Noel himself would have been ashamed of me. And I could not leave my work.'

' You might have written to him.'

' He would not have been allowed to write to me.'

' I think a way might have been found, all the same,' concluded Alice ; ' you do not know that the rich lady was really unkind. If you had seen her once, or written to her yourself, and explained to her how much you cared about Noel, and all you had done for him, she would most likely have been sorry, and acted kindly. You might have tried.'

' I am no good at explaining my feelings,' said Gronow, ' especially to strange old ladies who look down upon me from a height. They make me dumb.'

Alice could not help laughing.

' You are very impossible, Mr. Neilson,' she said, ' but all the same I can see that you cared about your little friend much more than you will own. If I were you I should try and find him out even now.'

The arrival of Mr. Lester and Nora interrupted their conversation. Gronow would not have cared to speak of Noel before them ; but he felt that to have told Alice about this past experience had again brought him into a nearer and more confidential relationship with her ; and the sort of reproof she had administered to him had rather added to than taken from this confidential feeling. Gronow had another keen interest at this time, which absorbed much of his thoughts. True to his purpose he had been systematically studying engineering for a long time past. He had already passed a preliminary examination in general knowledge—not very high, but still he had passed, and now he had entered his name for another examination in special subjects. He spent some of his savings in the necessary books and in fees, and now he thought he would be wise to lay out some money in being coached, as he was very anxious not to fail. He made no secret of all this, and his friends took an immense interest in his success ; Mr. Lester, indeed, grew more eager over it than he often did over anything, except cards.

'You deserve success, and I only wish I could ensure it to you,' he said to Gronow one evening, 'but I can't conceive how you get the time to read.'

'I make it,' replied Gronow, smiling.

'Well, it is a good thing you are made of iron or something akin to it,' observed Mr. Lester, 'or it is certain your constitution would not answer to the demands you make upon it.'

'It will have to answer to more serious demands yet I expect,' said Gronow.

'I think it is a pity you did not devote yourself to literature instead of engineering,' pursued Mr. Lester, 'it is a grand profession for those who take it seriously. I, alas! take nothing seriously; but for you, who throw yourself into every pursuit with such weighty ardour, I should think it would be an unequalled opening.'

'I quite admit the possibilities of a literary career,' replied Gronow, 'but I have not sufficient imagination to succeed in it. Lack of imagination is an irretrievable defect in a literary man. But in any case, I consider engineering as a profession second to none.'

'Your reasons?' asked Mr. Lester.

'Because,' rejoined Gronow, 'nothing helps onward the progress of mankind more than opening up and increasing the facilities for means of communication between man and man, between nation and nation. The man who makes a road, a railway, who bridges a river, who builds a ship, confers a benefit on the whole race—he has helped forward the interchange of the means of life, which is a great thing, and of thoughts and ideas, which is a greater. There is no surer benefactor of mankind than the engineer, in every department of his profession. If people could not travel about, how could they write books? And if there were no means of conveyance, so that knowledge could be spread, what would be the use of the books if they were written?'

'Very justly observed,' said Mr. Lester, 'though I imagine as much could be said for any other profession by an enthusiast in it.'

'That is the longest speech I have ever heard you make, Mr. Neilson,' remarked Alice rather mischievously.

'Perhaps it is the longest I have ever made,' Gronow replied, entering into the joke.

'You may find yourself in Parliament yet, before you die,' said Mr. Lester.

'Not I,' answered Gronow, 'that is the last object my ambition would fix upon. Well, I must be off now, to do my quota of reading before I sleep. The time is drawing near.'

'When is the exam.?' asked Lester.

'In March, and this is February already.'

Alice generally went to the door with Gronow, and this evening as she gave him her hand at parting she said earnestly :

'I do indeed wish you success, Mr. Neilson. I think it is splendid to work on like that by yourself, without any help or any advantages.'

Gronow was generally indifferent to either praise or blame ; but these words of praise went straight to his heart, and unloosed his tongue.

'I wish I could tell you,' he replied, 'how I value your good opinion and your good wishes.'

He laid an emphasis on the word 'your,' and for the first time Alice's eyes fell before the direct, keen gaze of the short-sighted brown eyes. He held her hand a moment longer than usual, and went out, forgetful of examinations and all else in heaven and earth except the touch of a woman's hand and the soft tones of a woman's voice.

Before Gronow's examination came off another event occurred which was the forerunner of important changes in the lives of those concerned. This event was the serious illness of little Nora.

A spell of cutting east wind in the beginning of March did the mischief. It began as a bad cold ; in a few days it developed into inflammation of the lungs. Gronow found Mr. Lester genuinely miserable, Alice inordinately anxious, and never taking ten minutes' rest, not even when Mrs. Forrest came over to help her.

'I wish you could get Alice to go and lie down for a

time,' Mrs. Forrest said to him ; 'she is quite beside herself with anxiety, and we shall have her ill next.'

Gronow went to Alice.

'Miss Deane, this will not do,' he said with decision, 'you must go and rest now.'

'I cannot rest,' she replied, 'and I do not need it yet, I am very strong.'

'No one is strong enough to do without food or sleep,' returned Gronow, 'and you must have both. You can safely leave Nora with Mrs. Forrest. She was a hospital nurse before she was married, and knows what she is about.'

'Oh, I know that,' said Alice, 'she is a much better nurse than I am ; but when I am away from Nora I am much more anxious then when I am with her. If I do go to bed I shall not be able to sleep or rest. You do not understand.'

That was true, certainly. It was the first time that Gronow had tried to understand a woman, and he was puzzled. Alice had always appeared to him full of practical common sense, not easily disturbed by outward events, and he was not prepared for this inconsistency, as it seemed to him. He had no doubt, however, as to how to deal with it. The masculine instinct to dominate was strong in Gronow.

'I understand,' he said quietly, 'that this is both wrong and absurd. You ought not to allow yourself to be so carried away by anxiety. At this rate you will break down in a few days, and then there will be the trouble and anxiety of nursing you. You must think of others besides yourself.'

Alice was already worn and irritable ; she strongly resented Gronow's masterful tone, yet she could not dispute the truth of what he said ; she turned away, like a child in a pet, and left him without another word.

A few minutes later, when he was leaving the house, Mrs. Forrest came to him for a moment and said, 'I am so glad you made Alice listen to reason ! I went to look at her just now, and she is fast asleep already—quite exhausted, poor girl !'

Gronow went home in a disturbed frame of mind. Alice had yielded to his will, and he was glad of it, but he was afraid that she was deeply offended with him. He was also sincerely concerned about Nora, for he had grown fond of the merry, wayward child, and thought he perceived in her the elements of a fine character. The next evening, when he left his work, he went straight to Beresford Street. Alice was in Nora's room, but presently she came out to him.

'Mr. Neilson,' she said frankly, holding out her hand, 'I was very rude to you last night, and you were quite right in all you said to me—I had a sound sleep, and felt much better for it. Please forgive me.'

Gronow had to put a real constraint upon himself, or he would have caught her in his arms.

'I am afraid I was rude too,' he replied, 'and I did not really mean that you were selfish, because you are not.'

'Oh yes, I am very selfish sometimes,' she answered smiling, and gently withdrawing her hand, which he had held while he spoke.

He inquired after Nora, who, however, was no better.

Then he asked where Mr. Lester was.

'I really do not know,' said Alice. 'Oh yes, he goes out just the same,' she added in answer to his look; 'after all, what would be the use of his staying here?'

'I should have thought he might have helped you in a good many ways,' replied Gronow rather drily. 'Is there anything I can do for you now?'

'Since you ask, I will get you to go to the chemist for me,' said Alice, 'if it is really not hindering you.'

Nora was in danger for several days, and when at last she took a turn for the better she could hardly have been recognised for the same child. All her plump roundness, her rosy colour, were gone. Her eyes had lost their brightness, her voice was weak and hoarse. Gronow had quite a shock when he first saw her.

However, she picked up rapidly, as children do, and, fortunately, March sustained his reputed character that year, and went out like a lamb.

Soft airs of spring wafted even into London streets the subtle scent of blossoming hedges and springing seeds. They whispered of life new-born and of love on the wing.

Gronow, coming in one Sunday afternoon, found the small party at the open window; Nora lying on the couch, but half leaning on Alice's shoulder; Mr. Lester stretched out on a canvas chair, with the inevitable cigar. Gronow bent down and kissed Nora, wishing ardently that he dared take the same liberty with another cheek that was temptingly near.

'You look more like yourself to-day, little woman,' he said cheerfully.

'Yes, doesn't she? And she has a grand appetite,' put in Mr. Lester.

Gronow looked at Alice; she smiled, but yet he saw that she was troubled. He wondered what it was, but felt certain that she would tell him by-and-by, when there was an opportunity. They had drawn very near to each other, these two, during Nora's illness, though they had really seen less of each other than in former days. It had become quite natural for Alice to turn to Gronow for advice and help, and it seemed quite natural to Gronow that she should thus turn to him.

After a while she went out to get the tea, and Gronow took her place beside Nora. The child held his large work-hardened hand between her two little white ones, playing with his fingers, and laughing at the contrast with her own. Presently she exclaimed, 'What is that funny white mark on your arm?'

She had pushed up his right sleeve, disclosing the scar which he had gained years ago in Noel's defence.

'That is a tidy scar, Neilson,' observed Mr. Lester when Nora drew attention to it.

'I must confess that it was got in a fight,' Gronow replied smiling, 'but the other chap didn't play fair.'

'Ah! and left you something to remember him by,' said Lester carelessly.

Gronow thought he understood the allusion.

He looked up at Alice, who had just re-entered the room, and saw that he was right.

Before he left that evening he made an opportunity to speak to Alice alone for a minute, when he said to her with a smile :

‘ What is it that you are worrying about now ? ’

‘ I am sorry I show it so plainly,’ she said apologetically, ‘ but it is really a worry. The doctor says that Nora ought to winter in a warm climate for several years, or there is danger of consumption.’

‘ That is a serious matter, certainly,’ said Gronow ; ‘ still, I suppose it is chiefly a question of expense. There is nothing else that compels you to remain in England ? ’

‘ N—no, but I don’t see how we shall afford it—and then I shall have to work up Mr. Lester to do it.’

‘ That can easily be done,’ said Gronow decidedly ; ‘ don’t fret yourself, Miss Deane. You have all the summer before you, and perhaps something will turn up. If not, we will make something turn up.’

His determined tone and manner, and the strong clasp of his hand, gave Alice an unspeakable sense of support. They were like solid ground under the feet of one who has been darkly tossing on tumultuous waves.

## CHAPTER VII

‘ My heart’s subdued  
Even to the very quality of my lord ;

. . . .  
And to his honours, and his valiant parts,  
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.  
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,  
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,  
I shall a heavy interim support  
By his dear absence : Let me go with him.’

‘ I AM chock full of news,’ said Gronow, coming in from work one evening, and brightening perceptibly as he became aware that Alice and Nora were in the room. It was Nora’s first visit since her illness.

‘ And we are all here to listen to it,’ replied Mrs. Forrest, looking at him with a rather knowing smile, as he shook hands with Alice.

‘ I can guess some of it,’ cried Nora, appropriating his knee as soon as he sat down. ‘ You have passed your examination ! ’

‘ What a wonderful guesser you are ! ’ returned Gronow, in great good humour.

‘ I hope she has guessed right ? ’ queried Forrest.

‘ Yes, I have passed.’

‘ And well, I hope ? ’

‘ Better than I expected. I am in the first class.’

They all congratulated him heartily. Gronow looked for Alice’s approval in her eyes, and was satisfied.

‘ Is that all your news, Mr. Neilson ? ’ pursued Nora.  
‘ That wouldn’t fill you chock full, would it ? ’

There was a general laugh as Gronow replied, ‘ I felt as if it had until I heard some more, which almost put it out of my head.’

'I think I could make a guess at that, if I liked,' observed Forrest.

'Probably you could,' returned Gronow, looking at him rather keenly; 'perhaps you had a hand in it?'

'Well, I admit that my opinion was asked,' replied Forrest, 'and I said what I thought: that it would be a splendid opportunity for you, because you would know how to make use of it.'

'But explain, explain!' cried Mrs. Forrest. 'Here are we three dying of impatience, while you two are talking riddles.'

Gronow laughed and explained.

'Trent Brothers want to get rid of me,' he said; 'they have offered me a very good position as foreman in their works at Johannesburg.'

'South Africa!' exclaimed Mrs. Forrest; 'but that is a long way off.'

Gronow looked at Alice, but she did not change countenance. Her heart seemed suddenly to have sunk, down, down; but he could not guess that, for Gronow had never yet spoken a word of love, and Alice would rather have died than have shown that she cared the least bit whether he went away or not.

On Nora no such reticence was incumbent, and she clung round his neck with open lamentations.

'Have you decided to accept it?' asked Mrs. Forrest.

'I have not given them my answer yet,' replied Gronow, 'but I believe I shall accept it.'

He did not look at Alice again, but if he had he would have seen no change in her face. She was only silent, and that was not noticed, as the rest had plenty to say.

'It would be a great pity to miss a really good opening, of course,' remarked Mrs. Forrest, 'but we shall miss you dreadfully all the same.'

'We can't expect Neilson to stay here always,' said Forrest.

'I do,' pouted Nora; 'he mustn't go all that long way off. Must he, Alice? Tell him not to.'

'I expect Mr. Neilson thinks that he can judge best for

himself,' replied Alice, smiling, and looking straight at him. Their eyes met, but only for a moment ; it was Gronow who looked away this time.

' You advise me to go, Forrest ? ' he asked.

' Yes, undoubtedly,' answered Forrest ; ' it is not every young fellow of twenty who has such a chance of promotion.'

There was something behind this, however, of which Forrest did not speak, and Gronow was not aware. The fact was that a difficulty had arisen in Trent's workshop about young Neilson. He was so clever, and understood every branch of his work so well, that he had already been advanced over the heads of men who were older than himself, and had been longer at the works. This would not have mattered so much if Gronow had been a favourite ; but, as I have said before, Gronow had never been popular with his fellow workmen. He knew it well enough, but it did not trouble him, for it was not in his nature to covet popularity or to miss it.

As it was, however, his rapid advancement had aroused a great deal of jealousy, and one or two good workmen had threatened to go elsewhere, conceiving that their merits were overlooked. It therefore occurred to the manager, who was very unwilling to lose Gronow's services altogether, that it would be a bright idea to draft him off to their branch works in Johannesburg, where he would have quite as good an opportunity of getting on and making his way, and where, being a stranger, his appointment would create no jealousy, especially as the business was carried on there on rather different lines, and a good many Kaffirs were employed.

Forrest, when his opinion was asked by the manager, strongly supported the idea. He was sorry to part with Gronow ; but he had seen for some time that the lad's position in the works was an impossible one and caused a growing discontent among the other workmen.

' It seems a lot of money,' observed Mrs. Forrest, when she heard what Gronow's salary was to be.

' Ah, but everything costs so much more out there,'

returned her husband ; ' twenty pounds a month only goes as far as ten would in this country.'

' Still, it seems a good living for a young man of Gronow's age.'

' I expect Gronow won't be satisfied with it long,' said Forrest, smiling a little.

' Oh, if I can only complete my education I will get on my own hook as soon as possible,' put in Gronow, ' but of course that cannot be for some years yet.'

' No, I should think not—don't let your vaulting ambition overleap itself,' remarked Forrest, ' though by what I hear there are grand openings for engineering in South Africa.'

They discussed the subject for some time longer, and then Alice, who had taken very little part in the conversation, rose to go, saying that Nora must not stay out too late.

Gronow also rose, as a matter of course, although it was still quite daylight, to escort them home. They walked very silently together, Nora chattering away for all three ; and her lively little tongue brought relief to the other two, who were neither of them anxious to speak just then. Gronow had plenty to say, but a difficulty in saying it ; Alice felt that she had nothing to say.

They reached the house in Beresford Street without having exchanged a dozen words. Gronow did not leave them at the door, he went in. Mr. Lester, as usual, was not there.

' He goes out every night lately,' observed Alice, with a sigh.

Gronow had noticed a change in Lester during the last few weeks ; he was irritable, moody, and anxious ; the lines about his eyes and mouth seemed harder and deeper, something in his manner and conversation indicated a deterioration of the man's whole nature. He was playing more than ever, and had had a run of bad luck ; he was sinking deeper than ever in the slough of hopeless self-contempt. This circumstance served to confirm Gronow in the resolution he had already formed.

Nora was despatched to bed, Alice made various excuses

for being in and out of the room, but still Gronow sat on, and nothing moved him. He might have the greatest difficulty in getting out what he wanted to say, but certainly he was quite determined to say it; and Alice, by some mysterious process, was perfectly aware that he intended to say it. At last, when she could find no further pretext for absenting herself, Gronow suddenly blurted out:

'I have really quite made up my mind to go to South Africa.'

'I suppose it is the best thing,' replied Alice, finding it more difficult to retain her self-control now that she was alone with him.

Gronow sought about for some fine words, but it was of no use, they would not come; nothing could he devise but the bald and abrupt question: 'Miss Deane, won't you come too?'

Alice could quite truthfully have answered, 'Yes, if you want me,' but maiden pride forbade such a ready response. Besides, there were difficulties. She looked at him, hesitated, and ended by repeating lamely:

'Come too, Mr. Neilson?'

'Yes, as my wife,' replied Gronow, beginning to find words. 'You are just the one woman in the world that I want. There could not be another; I never change my mind. And although I am not rich, I can give you a comfortable home, and I know I shall get on. Then there is another thing. I know you would not leave Nora, but Nora can come too. The climate would be the very thing for her, and take away the difficulty about the winter. And I would look after her just as if she were my own sister.'

'You are very good, Mr. Neilson,' said Alice gently, 'but suppose Mr. Lester would not let Nora go? I could not compel him to do so, and, as you say, I could not leave her.'

That last sentence was very hard to say, but Gronow did not seem troubled by it.

'I think he would let her go,' he said quietly; 'he would not take the responsibility of keeping her here alone, and he must see that it is for her own good to go. But is Nora the

only consideration, Alice? I want to know what you feel yourself. If you only care about Nora, and not about me, what is the use of talking about it ?'

'Oh, it is not that !' cried Alice, startled out of her reserve by his tone, 'I do care, Gronow.'

His name slipped out unaware, and she blushed deeply when she realised that it had done so. Gronow left his seat and came close to her side on the couch, and Alice trembled a little when she saw the passion in those keen brown eyes ; but it was not with fear or repulsion that she trembled, for she yielded willingly to the strong clasp of his arms, as he drew her close to him ; she even yielded her lips to his, feeling a keen and sweet surprise at this sudden, passionate wooing from the strong, silent young fellow whom she had never supposed capable of much outward demonstration of feeling.

Alice was won ; and won by those very qualities which Gronow had ignorantly supposed would most stand in his way. His silence and reticence, his cold, undemonstrative manner, had given Alice a confidence in her intercourse with him, which would have been instantly scared away by any undue familiarity or premature attempt at love-making. It was the essentially masculine quality of his mind, the virile strength of his character, that attracted her, and seemed to respond to some vigorous fibre in her own. Gronow was pre-eminently a masterful man ; but there was no danger that he would ever become a tyrant, he had too keen a sense of justice.

Reserve was broken down now, and together they passed one of the happiest hours of their lives ; hours tinged with that glow of romance, of a vague and subtle delight, unforgettable, inexpressible by any words, which belongs to youth by right, and departs with our youth, irrevocably. Later life may bring better and worthier aspirations, more solid and more lasting joys ; but they have lost the glamour, the ideal glory, 'the light that never was on sea or land.'

They talked confidently of their future. Gronow was sure that he could induce Mr. Lester to let Nora go with them ; Alice was a little doubtful about it.

'And if he does,' she added, 'he must still be made to support her. That will be the difficulty. I am afraid he will be only too ready to shirk that responsibility on to you, if he sees a chance.'

'That would not be right,' said Gronow; 'I might be able to do it, but it is his duty, not mine. He must be bound over in some way to send you that money which you say he receives regularly from some lawyers.'

'But how will you bind him, when you are all that way off? I often have a difficulty to get it even now.'

'Perhaps we could arrange for it to be sent direct to you, instead of to him.'

Alice shook her head.

'I have never been able to imagine,' she said, 'from whom or on what terms he gets it. If I had known that, I might have managed to have a certain sum secured to Nora; but I cannot interfere in his affairs like that.'

'It is not fit that you should have to deal with such a man at all,' Gronow said, drawing her head down on his shoulder, 'but you have given me the right to do it now, and you must leave it to me. You must trust me altogether.'

'So I do, of course,' replied Alice, looking up at him with the happiest smile. 'People have often called me self-reliant, but I don't think I am, really. I have been forced to rely on myself, but it is *much* nicer to rely on someone else who can be relied on.'

Gronow's answer to this was not in words, and Alice was presently glad to hide her face against his shoulder again.

'But in any case, Alice,' began Gronow, after a pause, 'whatever difficulty may arise about Nora—you won't let that stand in the way, now that you have given me your word?'

'I would *never* take back my word to you, Gronow,' she replied gravely; 'but as regards going with you now—or soon—you know that I could not leave Nora alone with her father; that would be a wicked thing to do. You think so too, don't you?'

She looked up anxiously into his grave face, as he answered her :

' We would not do that, of course ; but supposing that she did not come with us, but some other arrangement were made which ensured her health and welfare—you would consent to that ? '

Alice sighed deeply.

' I suppose I should,' she said, ' if you thought it right ; but I hope there won't be any difficulty.'

' I hope so, too,' said Gronow, ' and I do not see why there should be. Mr. Lester will not take the sole responsibility of Nora, that is quite certain. He will consent to anything rather than that.'

It grew late at last, and Gronow was obliged unwillingly to leave.

' I can't bear the thought of your being here alone at night,' he said ; ' it is not right. How often I have wished to take you away from this life ! '

' I have never thought of being afraid,' replied Alice ; ' the house is locked up, and besides, no one would come here to steal. There is nothing of any value here.'

' Except the most valuable treasure in the world,' said Gronow, lingering, unable to let her go.

' And fortunately no one wants that except yourself,' she replied, with a bright shy look, which drew an ardent response from him.

' And I want it so badly that I cannot live without it,' he said, and held her so tight that he really hurt her. ' Alice, darling, the only thing that could rob me of my manhood would be if you were to fail me ; but you could not do that.'

' No, Gronow, I could not do that,' she answered steadily, and looked at him with shining eyes, in which he was free to read what was plainly written for him. He read, and his inmost soul was satisfied. Alice was utterly and entirely his own.

## CHAPTER VIII

'A man, by his own fault, ruined; shut out of the garden of his gifts; his whole city of hope both ploughed and salted.'

IT was agreed that Nora should not be informed of the new turn of events until her own fate was decided, and for this purpose Gronow must interview Nora's father. As Gronow was busy all day, and Mr. Lester all night, a meeting was not altogether easy to arrange, and in fact it did not come off until the following Sunday afternoon, when Gronow, arriving in Beresford Street about four o'clock, found that Alice, as prearranged, had taken Nora out for a walk, while Mr. Lester, who had only just got up, was lounging in a dressing-gown on the couch, smoking and reading.

'Ah, good afternoon, Neilson, glad to see you. The girls are out walking somewhere.'

'I have come to see you, Mr. Lester, on a little matter of business,' said Gronow, seating himself.

'At your service, I am sure. What is this I hear about your emigrating to South Africa?'

'Yes, I have accepted a situation there; I sail in September.'

'Indeed! And is it a permanent thing?'

'For some years, at all events. Afterwards it will depend upon circumstances.'

'Well, I don't see why you shouldn't get on out there. I came to grief there, but it was partly my own fault. I trusted another man, and you are perhaps too sensible to do that. In any case, I know the country well, and may be able to give you some useful hints.'

'I shall be very glad of them,' replied Gronow, 'but just at present I want to consult you about another matter.'

Lester looked at him with a slight awakening in his dull,

wearied eyes ; eyes that seldom brightened now, except at the gaming-table.

Gronow continued :

' In the first place, I have to tell you that Alice and I are engaged to be married.'

' That,' said Lester, with all his old suavity of manner, ' is not at all a surprising piece of news to me.'

' Nor displeasing, I hope ? ' asked Gronow good humouredly.

' Quite the contrary. I congratulate you both with all my heart. Although, as you may suppose, I have no sort of control over Alice, still I should have been very sorry if she had thrown herself away in marriage. I believe, however, that you are about as near being good enough for her as any young fellow is likely to be. I think a great deal of Alice.'

' So do I,' replied Gronow gravely, ' and I thank you for a very high compliment. However, I must come to the point. Alice, of course, goes with me to South Africa.'

' Next September ? ' queried Lester.

' Next September,' continued Gronow steadily, ' and of course she is thinking a great deal about Nora. My suggestion is, that Nora should come too. I think the climate might improve her health—in fact, restore it entirely, and wherever Alice and I may be Nora can always have a home as long as she wants it. I should look upon her as my own sister. But this is subject, of course, to your consent.'

' You certainly propose to leave me in a rather appalling solitude,' observed Lester casually.

' Nora is too young to live alone here and keep house for you,' returned Gronow, ' and, as regards Alice, I have the first claim on her now.'

Lester contemplated him for a moment in amused silence, and then actually threw back his head and laughed out.

' You will never fail of your ambition, Neilson,' he said ; ' you have the most delightfully simple and direct way of going straight ahead at whatever you want, and taking it. I do not wonder that Alice could not resist you.'

'But Alice will resist me if she is not satisfied about Nora.'

'And I am not considered fit to look after my own daughter. You might as well say that as plainly as you have said all the rest.'

'It is not my business to say it,' replied Gronow, unmoved by this little ebullition of temper. 'I did not come here to insult you, Mr. Lester, but to ask you if you will not leave Nora under Alice's care, which you will allow is the best care she can have, and at the same time solve the difficulty of the English winter by transporting her to a warm, dry climate.'

Lester was at once ashamed of himself.

He had always possessed a great deal of outward self-control, but his nerves were worn and weakened by years of pernicious excitement.

'It is kind of you to make the offer, Neilson,' he said frankly, 'and I know that Nora would be as safe and happy with you as with a brother of her own. The little monkey is wonderfully fond of you. But I cannot consent to give up my daughter altogether.'

There was a pause. Gronow did not feel that he could say anything more just then, and Mr. Lester appeared to be thinking much more seriously than was usual with him. At last he broke silence, as he sat up and threw away the end of his cigar, by saying :

'I think I have hit upon the best solution of the problem. We will all go. Of course I am not going to inflict myself upon you and Alice ; but if you will give Nora a home, I will find some kind of a hook to hang myself upon, within reach of you.'

This idea was quite a new one to Gronow, and not altogether welcome. A connection like Mr. Lester would be no advantage to a young man starting on his career in a new country, and might become a most undesirable incubus. On reflection, however, it appeared to him the best way out of the difficulty. If Mr. Lester would not give up Nora, no one, as Alice had remarked, could compel him to do so ; and if he should give them any trouble out there, Gronow felt

himself strong enough to deal with him. He would never allow him to impose on any of them.

So he presented a clear brow to his future father-in-law as he replied to his proposition.

'If you really feel inclined to do that, Mr. Lester, I think it is a good plan. It would be very lonely for you to stay in England by yourself, certainly.'

'Well, I hated South Africa when I left it,' returned Lester, 'but that was because I had such hard lines there at the last. I was ruined, as perhaps Alice may have told you, by a fellow named Dupleix, a lad compared to me, who had the smoothest tongue, and the most charming manner, and was the most infernal cheat, of any man I ever came across.'

'Why did you not hand him over to the police?' asked Gronow.

'Because I had a soft place in my heart for the rascal. Besides, he scooted, and South Africa is a big country to lose yourself in. It is a fine country too—I think I shall rather like going back to it.'

'Johannesburg did not exist in your time, I suppose?' observed Gronow.

'No, indeed; I have travelled all over that country, and there was no more sign of a big city in those days than there is of a green tree in Chancery Lane. I shall be quite curious to see it.'

There was another short pause, and then Gronow said abruptly, 'Mr. Lester, I am a much younger man than you, and I daresay you will be offended with me, but it seems to me that in a country like South Africa there must be lots of opportunities for a man like you. You are cleverer than most men, and can do anything you like. If you would drop the play you could make a fresh start out there.'

'A fresh start at five-and-forty?' queried Lester rather sadly.

'Why not? Five-and-forty is the prime of life.'

'Not with a fellow who has fooled away his youth as I have. No, I am not offended, Neilson. You're a fine fellow yourself, but you won't find mission work and rescuing the fallen pay very well.'

'I don't think mission work is at all in my line,' replied Gronow, 'but the fact is, I hate to see waste of any kind. And there is a tremendous lot of waste when a man like you goes to the devil.'

'Very forcibly put,' remarked Lester, 'and no doubt you are perfectly right; but by the time you are as old as I am you will have found—as I have—that it is best to let people go to the devil their own way. If you stop them they still go, in some other way, and then they tell you it is your fault, and you probably believe them, and worry yourself about it all your life after. No, it is too late for me to become a reformed character—unless, indeed, I could get hold of one of those wonderful patent medicines you read about that repair every kind of waste, whatever the cause.'

'Those advertisements are criminal,' said Gronow abruptly, 'or would be if the man could really do what he professes to do. Drugs cannot take the place of self-control. And if they could, what a misfortune it would be!'

'Well, I don't know,' said Lester reflectively; 'if a man who has been a bit wild in his youth, and finds himself broken down and hipped in middle life, could get hold of some elixir that would restore the rose of youth and innocence, so to speak, from its own ashes, he might make a fresh start, and feel that he had some chance of keeping it up.'

'Not he,' replied Gronow, 'he would only return with fresh zest to his dissipations.'

'You are too wise for your age, Neilson,' laughed Lester, 'but with all your wisdom you have yet to learn that this is an imperfect world, and we must, unfortunately, take things as we find them.'

'But we must not always leave them as we find them,' said another laughing voice behind him; and Alice, who had entered the room quietly while he was speaking, gave Gronow a bright glance of greeting, while Nora promptly took possession of his knee.

'Very apt indeed, Alice,' said Lester approvingly; 'really, if you would cultivate it, you have quite a knack of repartee.'

Now, what sort of a plot do you think we have been hatching in your absence ?'

Alice glanced again at Gronow, and read in his face that all was well. An expression of relief came into her own.

'What is it, father ?' asked Nora curiously.

'What should you say, my girlie, if we all went with Gronow to the other end of the world ?'

'You and me, too, father ?'

'You and *I*, too. Correct your grammar, my child.'

Lester's eye had brightened, his manner was animated, he seemed in better spirits than Alice had seen him for a long time. She looked inquiringly at Gronow.

'Mr. Lester feels inclined to come with us, Alice,' Gronow said, in a tone that showed her he had already weighed and approved the idea ; 'he would like Nora to go, but he does not feel that he can part from her altogether. He will try and live somewhere near us.'

'And Nora will stay with us ?' asked Alice.

'Yes,' put in Lester, 'Nora will want your care for some years yet, Alice, and Gronow, like the good fellow he is, offers her a home. I am not going to be an incubus on you young married people ; you need not fear that.'

'Who are the young married people, father ?' asked Nora, who was all ears.

Everyone laughed, and Alice coloured, but Gronow said with a little triumph in his voice :

'Alice is going to marry me, Nora. That is why we are all going to South Africa together.'

This news was so tremendous that Nora became abnormally quiet over it. After a while she said to Gronow :

'Then you will be my own brother, won't you ?'

'Yes, it will be just the same thing,' replied Gronow, smiling at her.

After another pause for consideration, Nora asked :

'And will Mrs. Forrest come too, and Mr. Forrest ?'

'Well, no,' said her father, 'we can hardly expect the whole civilised community to migrate with us, however

agreeable it might be. We must find another Mr. and Mrs. Forrest out there if we can.'

'I shall miss them very much,' observed Alice.

Before Gronow left that evening, Lester remarked to him :

'You get your passage paid, of course, Neilson ?'

'Yes,' replied Gronow, who had been thinking of ways and means. 'I shall have to pay for Alice, of course.'

'And I will provide for Nora and myself,' added Lester quickly; 'don't you trouble, I will raise the wind somehow. I have a little money coming in.'

'Very well,' said Gronow, who had no wish to take any burden upon himself that belonged of right to Lester, 'and we can arrange about Nora's keep afterwards.'

'I will pay you so much a month for her,' said Lester readily.

Alice lingered with her lover at the door.

'You think it is best for him to come, Gronow ?'

'Yes, I do, dear. We cannot expect him to give up Nora to us entirely. And he may possibly do better out there if he can get something to do.'

Alice shook her head.

'I am afraid it is too late,' she said, 'you do not know him as I do. And if he should become a drag on you ?'

'He will not do that,' said Gronow decidedly, 'because I won't allow it. I am not going to support him. I will support Nora if he becomes really incapable of doing it, because she is your sister; but if Lester is determined to go to the bad, he must go, that is all.'

'And he will,' added Alice.

'Alice, darling, you must not worry yourself about the future. Remember you have me to care for you now. Isn't the prospect bright enough for you yet ?'

'Yes, indeed it is,' she whispered, clinging to him, 'and all owing to you. I do trust you really, and I love you, Gronow, I love you !'

'I will try to deserve her,' Gronow said to himself, as

he walked home that night ; and he was nearer to a wholesome humility than he had ever yet been in his life.

In the first week of October that year an Australian vessel, which had sailed from London three weeks before, called at Cape Town, and landed there four of her passengers, Mr. and Mrs. Neilson, and Mr. and Miss Lester. Some time later they all entrained for Johannesburg, there to seek and to encounter whatever Fortune might have in store for them.

## CHAPTER IX

'In life it is difficult to say who do you the most mischief, enemies with the worst intentions, or friends with the best.'

IN the gloomy and severely-furnished drawing-room of a gloomy and inconvenient little house in the fashionable quarter of Mayfair, Miss Lanyon and her satellite, Miss Calthrop, were passing a somewhat dreary evening together. A subdued lamp with a pink shade gave as much light as they needed, for they were neither reading nor working, but only talking, as they sat in two armchairs on either side of the fire. It was the end of April, but the evenings were still chilly.

Miss Lanyon had aged very much since the day, now thirteen years ago, when she had fetched away little Noel out of the orphanage. Her hair was snowy white, her face was lined and wrinkled all over, her tall upright figure began to stoop and look very feeble.

The change went further than that. The old lady had become very feeble-minded, too, and childish of late years; and Miss Calthrop, having lost her mother, had contrived by a good deal of diplomacy, and by making herself almost indispensable to Miss Lanyon, to insinuate herself as a permanent resident in her house, and to obtain a great deal of influence in the management of her affairs.

'You know, my dear Miss Lanyon,' she was saying at this moment, 'I always did advise you against adopting a perfectly strange child, of whom you knew nothing; and when I saw that you were quite set upon it, I again advised you to take a little girl rather than a boy.'

'I never cared for girls,' replied Miss Lanyon rather pettishly, 'they are so trifling. Boys give you much more pleasure—and more pain too,' she concluded with a sigh.

'And is the pleasure worth the pain?' suggested Miss Calthrop.

'Well, I used to think so, but now I am too old to combat pain any more, and I have been unfortunate no doubt. Lucy, has it not ever struck you that Noel is in some way—I can hardly say how—like Christian?'

'No, I cannot say it has,' Miss Calthrop replied with truth. 'Noel is very handsome—there is no question about that—and Christian was not even good-looking.'

'It is not a likeness in feature,' continued Miss Lanyon, 'but every now and then something in his figure, his gestures, seems to bring Christian before me so vividly.'

'Boys' manners are apt to be much alike, I think,' Miss Calthrop answered indifferently, 'and Noel is so very foreign-looking, he certainly cannot have only English blood in his veins.'

'Christian was of French descent partly,' said Miss Lanyon; 'his grandfather was quite French, and his father only half English.'

'Still, the Dupleix had married Englishwomen for two generations,' replied Miss Calthrop, 'and Christian was thoroughly English-looking. He had reddish hair and a freckled face.'

'Like my sister,' Miss Lanyon observed with a sad, reminiscent smile. 'What a trouble those freckles always were to her! And I dare say she would have fretted over them quite as much in her child.'

'Did you ever see Christian's father?' asked Miss Calthrop.

'No, never, nor did I ever see my sister again after she married him. She lived in Jersey during her short married life. I had Christian from four years old.'

She fell into a rather melancholy reverie, and silence reigned for a few minutes, which Miss Lanyon broke at length by saying thoughtfully :

'Noel was very good when he was a boy. And after all, he has done nothing bad.'

'It depends upon what you call bad,' answered Miss Calthrop rather sharply. 'I don't say he has committed a

crime ; it is his ingratitude to you that makes my blood boil.'

' He does not mean to be ungrateful,' said Miss Lanyon apologetically, ' he is young, and thoughtless, and selfish, as young people are apt to be.'

Miss Calthrop did not like this melting mood, but she was far too wise to oppose herself to it openly ; so she observed diplomatically :

' It is just like your goodness, dear Miss Lanyon, to excuse him ; but really, Noel is getting old enough to be thoughtful now. He must be about twenty.'

' Yes, about that,' answered Miss Lanyon, ' his exact age was never known of course ; but they believed him to be about eight years old when I took him from the orphanage, and I have kept that day as his birthday ever since.'

Just then they heard the click of a latch-key in the front door, and Miss Lanyon exclaimed :

' Why there is Noel ! He is very early this evening, it is only half-past ten.'

Miss Calthrop bit her lip as she noticed how the old, faded blue eyes brightened at the sound of the boy's footstep bounding up the stair. The next moment the door opened and Noel entered the room.

Miss Calthrop spoke nothing but the truth when she said that Noel was unquestionably handsome. His jet black hair had a fine natural gloss which owed nothing to dyes or hair-washes, and lay in thick waves across his broad low forehead. The dark brilliancy of his eyes was well contrasted by his clear pale complexion, and a nascent black moustache gave a touch of manliness to the boyish countenance, without hiding the pleasant, good-tempered curve of the lips, and the two rows of perfect teeth which were displayed by the frequent and ready smile.

He had never grown very tall, but his figure was compact and well proportioned, and, attired as he was in faultless evening dress, he was certainly, to look at, a lad to make a mother's heart rejoice. Half the lines seemed to smooth out of Miss Lanyon's face as he came and stood on the hearth-rug in front of her.

' You are keeping very early hours to-night, my boy,' she said smiling, ' this is something quite new for you.'

' Isn't it ? ' said Noel, smiling back at her affectionately. It was not by any means an invariable thing now for Miss Lanyon to speak to him in that gentle tone. ' But I am afraid,' he went on carelessly, ' that your good opinion of me will not last long. I am going out again.'

Miss Lanyon's face fell, and a gleam of satisfaction shone in Miss Calthrop's bird-like eyes.

' Where are you going then ? ' Miss Lanyon asked with a scarcely audible sigh. It was not audible to Noel, who replied cheerfully :

' Russell is giving a little supper after the opera to-night. I didn't care about the opera, but I am dying to be introduced to the divine Julia—ah well, that sort of thing doesn't interest you, Auntie,' he broke off with a merry, light-hearted laugh. ' Have you seen that new cigarette-holder I had this morning ? I came in on purpose to fetch it. Ah, there it is. Good-night, Auntie ; good-night, Miss Calthrop. Pleasant dreams to you both.'

He was gone again, the door closed heavily, and deep silence fell on the dreary house. Miss Lanyon shivered a little, and rose rather painfully from her chair.

' I will go to bed now, Lucy,' she said.

Miss Calthrop wrapped a shawl round the old lady's shoulders, and assisted her with an unobtrusive tenderness which was not all hypocrisy.

She had a real, if a somewhat interested, affection for Miss Lanyon ; and she had laboured so long to convince her that Noel was unworthy of her favour, that she was by this time quite convinced of it herself.

Miss Calthrop had never liked Noel. She looked upon him from the first as an interloper, who would one day become a usurper. His handsome face and winning manners failed to disarm her jealousy, in fact they heightened it. As he grew older she deliberately set herself to undermine Miss Lanyon's confidence in him, and, later on, her affection for him, which outlived her confidence ; and up to a certain point she had succeeded. Miss

Lanyon had grown suspicious, exacting, irritable, and unreasonable. She saw or suspected evil where there was really none, and her variable moods and tempers would have driven many a young fellow to open rebellion long before this.

As for Noel, he sometimes baffled and sometimes assisted Miss Calthrop's designs, both quite unconsciously to himself, and therefore kept her in a constant fever of anxiety, which did not increase her liking for him.

There was really no harm in Noel. He was, as Miss Lanyon had said, young, thoughtless, and selfish. That he was selfish was partly her own doing, for she had brought him up to be selfish. Everything had been made smooth and easy for him, all the stones had been picked out of his path, and he had learned to take it as a matter of course that he should have everything he wanted. He was at college now, but he made little pretence of studying, and was at present spending his Easter vacation in London, where Miss Lanyon had lived for some years, having parted with her house at Brighton.

Noel threw himself into all the pleasures of town life with the zest of a light-hearted, irresponsible boy. His natural refinement preserved him from coarse vices, from which he shrank with repulsion ; but excitement, gaiety, pleasure, flirtation—all these were the breath of life to him, and he pursued them with an ardour which might have carried him far in more serious pursuits. It never occurred to him that he had any duties or responsibilities ; he was not really ungrateful to Miss Lanyon, but he thought it quite sufficient to be attentive, amiable, and courteous when he was with her. Of demonstrative affection there never had been much between them.

And this must be said, that Noel bore all his benefactress's exactions and fretfulness with unfailing patience and good temper. He never gave her a cross word ; but, on the other hand, he paid very little attention to what she wanted him to do, and did not do it unless it pleased him.

Noel had no particular dislike for Miss Calthrop, though he was certainly not fond of her. He thought she was

lonely and not well off, therefore he felt rather sorry for her, and it seemed to him on the whole a good thing for both the old ladies that they should live together, instead of each living alone. He was always as polite to Miss Calthrop as he was to every lady, and beyond that he never thought of her. Certainly, he had not the remotest idea how much she thought about him.

When Miss Calthrop succeeded in worming her way into Miss Lanyon's household, she thought that the end of her ambition was well in view. She had a luxurious home for the present; and to supplant Noel in the future seemed only a work of time and patience.

After three years of patient application, however, she was obliged to own herself more or less disappointed. In spite of Miss Lanyon's failing powers and growing childishness, there were still depths of secrecy in her character into which Miss Calthrop knew that she had never penetrated, and into which, try as she would, she found, to her surprise and dismay, that she could not penetrate. What Miss Calthrop most longed to know was, whether Miss Lanyon had made a will in Noel's favour.

It seemed most probable that she had; but on this matter the old lady's lips were sealed, and all Miss Calthrop's diplomatic efforts could not unseal them. Miss Lanyon had always been a good business woman; reserve and silence about money matters were with her the habit of a lifetime; and this habit persisted, if anything it was intensified, in the gradual on-coming of age, and the gradual decay of her powers.

Miss Calthrop knew, therefore, that she had not Miss Lanyon's full confidence, and the knowledge continually chafed her. As for Noel, he never troubled his head about the matter; he took it for granted that he would be Miss Lanyon's heir, and enjoy himself all his life as he was doing now, just as he took it for granted that the sun would rise, and he would have his breakfast to-morrow morning.

' You have not spent one evening with me, Noel,' Miss Lanyon said to him reproachfully on the last day of the vacation, ' and to-morrow you go back to Oxford.'

'Well, Auntie, how can I help it, if people invite me? You should go out more yourself, it would do you good!'

'I am too old, Noel.'

'Well, I have no particular engagement till nine o'clock, and it is only eight now, so let us have a game of backgammon,' and Noel sat down to the backgammon board with the same cheerful good-temper with which he would have started out to a pleasant party.

They played for nearly an hour, and then Noel said, with a glance at the clock :

'I ought to be off, now, Auntie. Miss Calthrop will take my place, won't you, Miss Calthrop?'

'You might just finish this game,' said Miss Lanyon rather plaintively.

'How childish she is growing to be sure!' Noel thought to himself ; but aloud he said :

'All right, it won't matter if I am a little late I suppose. Your turn then, Auntie.'

He hurried over the game with inattention, nevertheless, and went away, plainly satisfied that he had done all that could be expected of him.

Miss Lanyon pushed away the board when he was gone, and turned her face towards the fire.

'Ah, Lucy,' she said, in a tremulous voice, 'never wish to grow old. We devote ourselves to the young, and the young weary of us, and leave us ; and we are quite alone. No one wants us.'

'Dear Miss Lanyon,' said Miss Calthrop, with real feeling, as she rose and came to her side, 'you are not quite alone, nor without one person that wants you, as long as I live. I shall always be your attached friend.'

She said it, and she meant it, sincerely ; but we know that men have sometimes prayed to Heaven to preserve them from their friends.

## CHAPTER X

'Our wills, our fates, do so contrary run,  
 That our devices still are overthrown ;  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.'

A FEW weeks after his return to Oxford, Noel received, to his surprise, a letter from Miss Calthrop, the first, perhaps, that she had ever written to him. She wrote to tell him that Miss Lanyon was ill, having been a fortnight in bed with an attack of influenza.

'She is up and about again now,' she continued, 'but her mind seems to be seriously affected. She is quite wandering sometimes, and does not seem to know people. I feel rather nervous at being alone with her, having only young servants in the house, yet I do not like to engage a nurse on my own responsibility, and it might make Miss Lanyon angry to see a stranger about her. I should be so glad of your advice and assistance in this difficulty.'

It was quite a new departure for Miss Calthrop to be asking Noel for advice and assistance, and Noel was inclined to think that there was something more than met the eye in this; however, he arranged for a couple of days' absence, and went up to London. Before he arrived one or two incidents had occurred which proved to be of more importance than they appeared to be at the time.

It was quite true that since her illness Miss Lanyon's behaviour had been very strange, and it was also true that Miss Calthrop sometimes felt nervous. The poor old lady's mind seemed to be constantly travelling in far-away years, and the images of that time, growing distinct and vivid, confused the real figures of the present, so that she mistook the one for the other. She called Miss Calthrop by the name of an old school friend who had been long dead; she spoke constantly of 'Christian,' but always in terms

of reproach, and sometimes looked fearfully about her, as if she expected and dreaded to see him.

Miss Calthrop, who knew a good deal of what the scapegrace nephew had made the old lady suffer, felt really sorry for her and at the same time somewhat alarmed at her condition. Her letter to Noel was prompted by various motives. She did not wish to take any responsibility upon herself ; she was curious to see whether Miss Lanyon would take Noel for Christian, which seemed not impossible ; she wondered whether, in that case, she would completely turn against Noel ; but she did not own, even to herself, that if that should be the case it might help a favourable development of affairs.

However, the day after she had written to Noel, Miss Lanyon suddenly appeared to be quite herself again. She walked more uprightly, her eye was brighter, her memory clearer. She called Miss Calthrop by her right name all day, and in the afternoon asked her to go out and do a few errands for her. Miss Calthrop could not refuse, though she did not like leaving the old lady alone ; however, she enjoined the servants to keep an eye on her, promised to be back soon, and went out.

When she returned, about an hour later, the girl who opened the door to her said :

'Please 'm, Miss Lanyon said as how she felt cold, and told me to light a fire in her bedroom ; which I did, 'm, and she have been sitting there very quiet ever since.'

As it was a warm, balmy day in June this seemed rather a strange proceeding ; but Miss Lanyon was old, and had been ill, and might possibly feel cold on the warmest day. Miss Calthrop went up to her. The first thing she noticed on entering the room was a strong odour of burnt sealing-wax ; the next was that Miss Lanyon had been burning papers. Some of them were blue papers, for there were pieces not quite burned lying in the grate.

Miss Lanyon looked round as her companion entered, and said quietly :

'Ah, there you are, Lucy. I had a fire here as I felt

chilly. I would not have it in the drawing-room because I knew you would feel it too hot; and I have been taking the opportunity of burning some old letters.'

'Rather a melancholy occupation,' observed Miss Calthrop, looking sharply at the scraps of blue paper.

'But a necessary one,' returned Miss Lanyon; 'I have not much longer to live, and I had papers which I did not wish to fall into the hands of my successors.'

'Dear Miss Lanyon, do not indulge in forebodings,' said Miss Calthrop soothingly, 'you are better to-day than you have been for a long time.'

Miss Lanyon made no reply to this, but presently remarked that she felt much warmer, and would like to go down to the drawing-room. Before they left the room Miss Calthrop's quick eye noted that a large desk, from which Miss Lanyon had presumably taken the burnt papers, and which she always kept locked, was slightly open, and some papers projected from it. She did not call Miss Lanyon's attention to this circumstance, but treasured it up for her own benefit. It might be highly advantageous to her if she could get an opportunity of peeping at the contents of that desk.

Miss Lanyon was very clear and collected all the evening. She played several games of draughts with Miss Calthrop, and sat up later than usual.

The next day Noel arrived.

He came by an early train, and Miss Lanyon, who never rose now till after breakfast, had not long been up. She was very quiet that morning, and had scarcely spoken to anyone.

When Noel entered and came forward to greet her, Miss Lanyon put out her hand as if to ward him off. 'I have been expecting you, Christian,' she said quietly, 'but you are too late. It is of no use now.'

Miss Calthrop gave Noel a meaning glance, from which, however, he gathered nothing.

'Dear Auntie,' he said, sitting down beside her, 'I am not Christian, I am Noel, whom you took out of the orphanage. Don't you remember?'

Yes, I remember taking Noel out of the orphanage, but

that is long ago, and you are Christian. But I tell you, you are too late—just a day too late. I have been repairing the wrong you did all my life ; and I must still repair it after my death.'

All this was as much an enigma to Miss Calthrop as it was to Noel himself, and when he appealed to her afterwards for an explanation she could give him none. Noel was really concerned about Miss Lanyon ; he sat for some time talking to her, trying to convince her of his identity ; but it was of no use. She called him nothing but Christian, and continually harped on the same theme of some great wrong he had done which she had laboured to repair. Noel was quite at a loss. 'I think we will get the doctor to come in,' he said to Miss Calthrop, 'perhaps a soothing draught might do her good. How does she sleep ?'

'Not very well, I think,' replied Miss Calthrop, 'but I have not been sitting up with her the last few nights at all, she seemed so much better.'

Later in the day the problem was solved for them. Miss Lanyon had a stroke.

The doctor thought it unlikely that she would recover from it. He said that a few days would show, and wished Noel to remain. Noel remained, therefore, and readily took a share of the nursing ; he had a light tread, a gentle touch, and an inexhaustible fund of good nature. He was so kind and helpful to Miss Calthrop, that the lady felt several twinges of conscience, and found herself hoping that Miss Lanyon might have left him a good sum of money though it was impossible to contemplate him with equanimity as the heir to all her property.

On the third night the doctor told them that Miss Lanyon would not live until the morning. Miss Calthrop, who was taking the first watch, promised to call Noel if there was any change, and Noel thereupon went to rest.

Miss Calthrop sat alone in the sick-room. A small fire flickered in the grate, and a shaded lamp stood on a little table near the bed ; but the room was mostly in shadow, and so was the bed where the sick woman lay unconscious, breathing painfully. An hour passed quietly, during which

Miss Calthrop's eyes frequently wandered to an object which constantly occupied her thoughts—the large desk which had been left unlocked. It was not unlocked now, for Miss Calthrop had herself locked it, and had possession of the key.

This seemed a good opportunity to examine its contents. The servants were in bed, the trained nurse was also resting, Noel was out of the way—now was her chance, really the first that she had had.

She went quietly to the desk, carrying the little lamp, which she set on the table alongside; then she unlocked the lid and opened it.

There were several bundles of papers, all neatly tied and docketed. Miss Calthrop took up one, which appeared to be a packet of letters, and was just about to read the label, when suddenly she heard a sound from the bed, and looking round saw, to her dismay, Miss Lanyon sitting straight up, with wide open, glassy eyes fixed on her. Miss Calthrop was so terribly startled that she did not know what she was doing. Quite mechanically she slipped the packet of letters into her pocket, closing the desk at the same time. Then, with the lamp in her hand, she went to the bedside; but just as she reached it the old lady gave a deep sigh, and fell back dead.

Miss Calthrop thereupon recovered her presence of mind. She went back to the desk and locked it, putting the keys in a little bag with Miss Lanyon's other keys. Then she called Noel and the nurse, and explained to them how very suddenly the end had come. As a matter of fact Miss Lanyon breathed for a few minutes longer, but life was practically extinct from the moment she fell back in the bed. She had never been conscious since she had the stroke.

Noel recalled all her former goodness to him, and was really grieved. He also felt very sorry for Miss Calthrop, who, he conceived, would now feel herself quite alone in the world; and he privately determined that if Miss Lanyon had not left her a substantial legacy he would find some means of making it up to her.

The funeral was a quiet one. Miss Lanyon had kept very

much to herself for some years past, many of her old friends had dropped off, and she had not filled their places with new ones. So that it was a very small party that assembled afterwards for the formal reading of the will.

Old Mr. Abdy, who had been Miss Lanyon's solicitor for forty years, seemed troubled in his mind about this time. He came to Noel, and asked him if he knew anything about Miss Lanyon's latest will.

'Nothing whatever,' replied Noel surprised.

'Miss Lanyon was always very reticent about her affairs,' observed Miss Calthrop.

'It is very strange,' continued the old lawyer, with a perplexed countenance, 'I have searched and searched, but I can find no other will than this.'

'And is it not the latest?' asked Noel.

'No, it is one that she made nearly fifteen years ago. I did not even suppose that she had kept it. I drew up another for her about seven years ago, and that is the one I cannot find.'

'She always kept it herself?'

'Yes, she kept all papers herself, and was very methodical and careful in her arrangement of them. Miss Lanyon was a good woman of business.'

At this point Miss Calthrop thought it advisable to tell the story of the burnt papers, which she did circumstantially. Mr. Abdy's face lengthened as he listened, and Noel began to look serious.

'You say that Miss Lanyon's mind had been wandering,' observed the lawyer. 'Is it possible that she intended to destroy the old will, and destroyed the later one by mistake?'

'It seems to me quite as possible that she intended to destroy the later one,' returned Miss Calthrop rather sharply. 'She could not see to the end of this affair at all.'

'If that is the case,' said the lawyer, 'this will is of course valid.'

'That was made before she adopted me?' asked Noel gloomily.

'Yes, about a year before.'

'Well, we had better hear that one, I suppose. We can have another look for the other one afterwards.'

The lawyer shook his head.

'I fear I have searched every possible place,' he said, 'unless, indeed, Miss Lanyon made a more recent will yet, and had it drawn up by some other lawyer, who has possession of it.'

'That is most improbable,' replied Noel, 'as Miss Lanyon always kept her own papers, and I am pretty sure she never employed any other lawyer but yourself. Besides, we should have received the will, or heard of it by now.'

'Quite true,' agreed Mr. Abdy. 'Shall I read this one then?'

'Yes, go on,' returned Noel, settling himself resignedly in his chair.

The proceeding did not take many minutes. There were a few bequests to certain charities to which Miss Lanyon had been a regular subscriber, Noel's orphanage being one of them, and two or three small legacies to old servants of the family. Noel's name, of course, was not mentioned; Miss Calthrop had a hundred pounds; and all the rest of Miss Lanyon's estate, amounting, in round figures, to some thirty thousand pounds, was left to one Nora Lester, of whom neither Miss Calthrop nor Noel had ever heard in their lives.

There was a codicil to this remarkable will, in which the proviso was made that, should Christian Dupleix, or his heirs, come to light any time within twenty years after the date of this will, the half of the property was to go to him, or them, but not if more than twenty years had elapsed.

'That condition is practically null and void,' added Mr. Abdy; 'for some years past I know that Miss Lanyon has from time to time advertised in various English and South African papers for Christian Dupleix or his heirs; but as no answer has ever been received, I think we may safely conclude that he is dead without issue.'

'But who the deuce is Nora Lester?' burst out Noel; and Miss Calthrop felt quite grateful to him for expressing her own thoughts in suitable language.

'I really cannot give you much information,' returned Mr. Abdy, in his deliberate manner, 'all I can tell you is this. For the last eighteen or nineteen years our firm have paid quarterly, on Miss Lanyon's behalf, an annual income of a hundred and fifty pounds to a Mr. Gerald Lester, and this Miss Nora Lester I imagine to be his daughter; but I have not the slightest idea who they are, nor what manner of claim they had upon Miss Lanyon. She never told me anything about them, except to direct me to pay the money as aforesaid. And the property is subject to that charge as long as Mr. Lester lives.'

'And you never had any communication from this Mr. Lester himself?' asked Noel.

'Only when he changed his address, which he did rather frequently,' replied the lawyer.

It may safely be said that seldom, if ever, has a will produced a more complete sensation than this one. No one's wildest guesses could ever have come near it; and Mr. Abdy, the only man who knew its contents, having drawn up the later will, which was in Noel's favour, did not even suppose that this one was still in existence; he was, therefore, as much astonished as anyone.

To save the relation of unnecessary details, it may be said here at once that Miss Lanyon's later will never turned up. In some access of unreasoning anger against Noel, or some confusion in her failing brain between him and her nephew Christian, she had destroyed it, and the earlier one therefore came into force. Miss Calthrop got her hundred pounds; and Noel was left absolutely destitute.

## CHAPTER XI

'They give thy letter to me, even now :  
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.'

MISS CALTHROP was a much disappointed woman. She had, indeed, scarcely dared to hope that she would succeed to all Miss Lanyon's property ; though, in default of Noel, it did not clearly appear who would do so ; but she had certainly expected to receive a great deal more than a hundred pounds. What was a hundred pounds ? She might just as well have nothing at all. After all that she had done for Miss Lanyon, after years devoted to her service, after half a lifetime of scheming and diplomacy, to have earned—a hundred pounds ! She could have earned more by going out as a housemaid. In the first bitterness of her disappointment it was hard to keep a serene face before the outside world ; but it was absolutely necessary to do so, for she wished everyone to believe that her devotion to Miss Lanyon had been quite disinterested. As a matter of fact, no one did believe it ; but Miss Calthrop always spoke of her late benefactress in terms of the greatest affection, and gave it to be understood that she had lost the one friend and companion of her declining years. The only person to whom Miss Calthrop felt more kindly disposed, on account of their joint calamity, was her *bête noir*, Noel. She was not devoid of the milk of human kindness, and, as things had turned out, Noel had done her no injury, and she had no cause for jealousy ; on the contrary, he was much worse off than herself. Moreover, the lad was so utterly crushed and stunned by this totally unexpected blow, that the hardest heart must have felt some sympathy for him. In fact, he looked really ill, and hardly seemed to take in what was going on around him. Miss Calthrop showed him many little kindnesses during those first dark days.

Mr. Abdy was very kind also. He had always liked Noel, and felt exceedingly sorry for him; for Miss Calthrop he had not much sympathy, having fairly estimated her character, and penetrated her designs long ago. He told them both, however, that they need not hurry about turning out of the house. It would take some time to communicate with Miss Lester, who was in South Africa; and as the young lady was under age, and he and his partner were appointed trustees to the estate, he was able to speak with authority.

About a week after the funeral Miss Calthrop was turning out her wardrobe, where, among other things, was the dress she had been wearing on the night of Miss Lanyon's death, and which she had not put on since. As she lifted it down, she felt that the pocket was heavy, and with a sudden dart of recollection she put in her hand and drew out the packet of letters which she had abstracted from Miss Lanyon's desk.

She felt but little interest in them now, yet when she glanced at the label slipped inside the band her interest suddenly revived, for on it was written, 'Letters of Mr. Gerald Lester.' Here perhaps was the clue to that mysterious will; here, perhaps, was yet some useful knowledge to be obtained, some secret which might hold a promise of gain for the future. Miss Calthrop left her wardrobe in confusion, and sat down to read Mr. Lester's letters.

The first letter was dated nearly twenty years back, and was a very long one. The paper was yellow, the ink faded; nevertheless, Miss Calthrop read every word of it with the most careful attention.

The writer, who gave a South African address, began by introducing himself as 'a sincere friend of your unhappy nephew, Christian Dupleix, from whom I have often heard of you, and have gathered, from what I have heard, your great kindness to him, and the base return which he has made to you.'

Then followed an elaborate apology for the liberty taken in writing, and after that, on the fourth page, the writer began to come to his point.

He described how he had first met Christian Dupleix in a little South African town, how he had been attracted by him, had believed him to be an honourable man, and a friendship had sprung up between them. He gave circumstantial details of a business they had undertaken in partnership, and how all had appeared to go well for a time, until he discovered that Christian was an inveterate gambler, and was taking money out of the business to pay his gambling debts. He related, with some pathos, his own efforts to save the misguided youth, and their complete failure. Finally, according to his account, Christian had bolted, leaving him to bear the brunt of the crash that followed.

'It has occurred to me,' the writer continued, 'that if Christian can get out of the country he will perhaps return to England to throw himself on your mercy. If so, I implore you not to cast him out altogether. I believe there is much good in him, and he is still young. That you should be severe with him would be only right; but I conjure you to give him another chance.'

'I, alas, can do nothing more for him, though I gladly would were it in my power. It is not only that I do not know where he is, for I might be able to find him, but that owing to the failure of our business I am myself completely ruined. I had made a good deal of money at the Diamond Fields, but that is all gone.'

'I confess that this is partly my own fault. I ought to have looked after Christian more sharply. I ought not to have trusted him so blindly. I was very loth to suspect him, and when I began to do so, it was already too late. For this reason I felt myself, as you may suppose, in honour bound to pay off all debts—not, of course, Christian's personal debts, but all those involving our customers—and the consequence is that I have nothing left.'

There was much more in the same strain, well written, clearly worded, and revealing in every line a man of the world and a scholar. The letter was a work of art. No one could call it a begging letter, yet reduced to its original elements, it was nothing else. It professed to be an appeal on Christian's behalf; it was really an appeal on his own.

It said, in effect, ‘Your nephew has ruined me, and you are bound to do something for me,’ yet there was no such sentence in the whole epistle, which occupied four sheets of foreign paper.

‘What an accomplished scoundrel!’ Miss Calthrop said to herself, when she had patiently perused the last sentences; and she owned to herself that she had never risen to such heights in diplomacy.

She passed on with growing interest to the next letter, the contents of which were exactly what she expected—namely, a profound yet dignified acknowledgment of pecuniary assistance received, ‘which you are pleased to call a just debt, but which I must always regard as an undeserved kindness.’

It was easy to fill up the gaps with Miss Lanyon’s letters to this plausible blackmailer. Miss Calthrop could see, as plainly as if she had read them, the few and formal words in which Miss Lanyon would express regret for the disasters caused by her unworthy nephew, the reserved delicacy with which she would offer from her own ample means some compensation for those disasters, compensation which she would esteem the payment of a just debt, and would beg Mr. Lester to do likewise.

‘I wonder she believed him so easily,’ reflected Miss Calthrop, ‘the whole story may have been a pack of lies. But she had so turned against Christian that she would have believed any evil of him; and it is quite likely that she obtained some proof of this man’s assertions.’

Apparently she had done so; for Mr. Lester’s next letter contained a reference to some business man with whom Miss Lanyon, or her lawyers, had evidently had some communication. ‘Mr. Abdy seemed to know nothing about this Lester, though,’ thought Miss Calthrop; ‘it is a pity that Miss Lanyon did not consult him instead of conducting the whole business herself, as she evidently did. To think that the rascal should have been sponging on her like that for twenty years, without our knowing anything about it! And to get the whole property in the end! It is perfectly disgraceful. Downright blackmail and nothing else. Poor Miss Lanyon

was always quite morbid about Christian, and all the mischief he did. As if she could help it, or it was her business to repair it. She threw away lots of good money like that, more's the pity.'

She opened the next letter. It was a reply to Miss Lanyon's offer of a permanent yearly income, and was so beautifully worded that one quitted the perusal of it with a confused impression that Mr. Lester had been conferring a favour on Miss Lanyon. Miss Calthrop began to feel an intense contempt for such duplicity. And yet it was admirable, too, in that it had succeeded.

The next letter, dated a year later, had an English address, and announced Mr. Lester's marriage. He called it a love match, modestly implying that his wife had no fortune. Again a year later came the announcement of the birth of a little girl, whom they had christened Nora. Miss Calthrop reckoned the age of the girl to be now sixteen.

'So that when Miss Lanyon made that absurd will, leaving the child all her property, she was only a baby of two years old.'

After this there was a gap of a few years in the correspondence, and then came quite a heart-broken letter announcing the death of Mrs. Lester. There was more sincerity and simplicity in the tone of this letter than in any of the others.

The next in order brought an astonishing discovery.

It was evident that Miss Lanyon had offered to adopt little Nora, for Mr. Lester wrote declining the offer on the ground that he could not give up his child, and expressing himself in the usual dignified and exquisitely suitable language.

'Let me see—this was long after she adopted Noel,' reckoned Miss Calthrop; 'this little Nora must have been about seven years old when her mother died, and Noel would have been—yes, about eleven. And Miss Lanyon always said she did not care about girls. Well, well! There was a great deal in the old lady that I never knew or suspected, and I don't believe anyone else did either. I wonder why Lester did not let her adopt the child. I suppose he thought

it would pay him better to keep her than to part with her. And I dare say it did.'

The last letter in the packet was dated seven years back, and announced that, owing to events in the family, Mr. Lester had decided to return to South Africa. Nora, he added, showed a tendency to consumption, and a warm climate was necessary for her health. This closed the correspondence.

Miss Calthrop sat long with the packet in her hand, reflecting what it would be best to do with it.

She ought, of course, to give the letters to Mr. Abdy, who was Miss Lanyon's executor; it was even possible that if Mr. Lester's story were proved to be false he might be convicted of obtaining money under false pretences, and that might upset the will.

'But I suppose they could not hold the girl responsible for the misdeeds of her father. The will is quite legal. And Miss Lanyon must surely have obtained some proof of the story. She could not have been so foolish as to pay away all that money without a good reason for it. Yet she was very foolish sometimes; in fact, I begin to think she was not always quite right in her head.

'Will these letters be of any use to me if I keep them? If Miss Nora Lester is a girl with any proper pride she would probably give a good deal for the chance of destroying them. And if she knew how shamefully I had been treated she might see that a little compensation was at least as much due to me as it ever was to her father. On the other hand, the child of such a father is not likely to have much proper pride, or much consideration for anyone except herself. Still, the letters would probably be an annoyance to her. She would not like them to be in the possession of a stranger. I could easily account to her for my having them, and she might be willing to give a good deal for them.'

It did not seem to occur to Miss Calthrop that the course of action she proposed to herself was very much akin to the blackmailing which she had so vigorously condemned in Mr. Lester.

'But now this girl is in South Africa—how is she to

see the letters? I certainly can't go out there to find her. It would be no good to send them to her, because she would simply make away with them. I might send her one—the first one—and tell her that I had others; but even that would be risky. I had rather not let any of them out of my hands, if there is anything to be made out of them.'

Finally, Miss Calthrop decided to keep the letters for the present, and say nothing about them. If they should seem likely to bring her into trouble she could easily burn them at any time. She would wait, and see if anything turned up which might give her a favourable opportunity of producing them. Miss Lester, on hearing of her inheritance, might perhaps come to England. In any case, being a rich woman, she was pretty sure to pay a visit home sooner or later.

There was one matter on which these letters threw no light at all, and that was the ultimate fate of Christian Dupleix. Miss Calthrop sometimes shared Miss Lanyon's superstitious dread that he would some day turn up again, with power to work more mischief; but on the whole it seemed most likely that he was dead, and that the mystery surrounding the last years of his life would never be cleared up.

## CHAPTER XII

‘ You who keep account  
Of crisis and transition in this life,  
Set down the first time Nature says plain “ no ”  
To some “ yes ” in you, and walks over you  
In gorgeous sweeps of scorn.’

It took Noel quite a week to realise that he was penniless ; but when he did realise it, he pulled himself together with wonderful rapidity. Noel was not unmanly or namby-pamby. He had the faults of his age and of his bringing up ; but he had plenty of grit, only he had never yet required it.

He began to think that it would be rather fun to go out into the world and earn his own living. Why should he not succeed as well as others ? He had youth, health, and a pair of hands, and a brain of which he had never seriously tested the powers, but which he believed to be at least of average quality. The great question was, What was he best fitted to do ?

He had never studied anything very deeply, he was not master of any one subject, and he had never provided himself with a single thing in his whole life. Now he had to provide himself with everything.

Under these circumstances Noel made two grand discoveries, which we all make at some period of our lives, and which it is well for us if we make while we are as young as he was. The first was the real value of his friends, and the second was the real measure of his own incapacity.

Noel had always been popular, and had always been under the impression that he had a good many friends. He now discovered that he had only a few friends, and

they were not persons whom he had ever regarded as friends at all.

The young men who had shared his pleasures, and who had hitherto appeared to be well off, now declared themselves, one and all, to be 'fearfully hard up.'

They need not have been afraid, however, that Noel wanted to borrow from them; he had no intention of borrowing what he had no prospect of being able to repay. Noel was not dishonest.

On the other hand, old Mr. Abdy, whom Noel had always looked upon as a mere business machine, expressed a warm sympathy for the young fellow, offered him a loan out of his private purse, and further, offered to take him into his office, and train him as a clerk, giving him a small salary to begin with.

'It is downright good of you, Mr. Abdy,' said Noel gratefully, 'and I believe I ought to accept your offer without hesitation. But I must confess that I do shrink from the idea of a sedentary indoor life. If I could not get any more active employment, I almost feel as if I would rather be a groom or a gardener.'

'You would not mind the work perhaps, but you could not stand the associates,' observed Mr. Abdy.

'I suppose not; but I think I will look round me a little longer. If there is really nothing else I can do, I suppose I must be a clerk.'

'Well, take a week to think about it,' said the old lawyer, 'and let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.'

Noel went down to Oxford to take his name off the college books and to sell his furniture and belongings. He had no considerable debts to pay, for Miss Lanyon had always made him a liberal allowance, and he was not particularly extravagant. The men of his set, which was not a reading set, looked somewhat askance at him, and one or two absolutely cut him; but a lad who lived in the rooms above him, and of whom Noel had never taken much notice, as he was quiet and studious, came to him now with shy friendliness, bought all his books,

pictures, and ornaments at their full value, and begged him to come and spend the long vacation with him at his home in Warwickshire.

'I know my people will be awfully glad to see you ; and it would give you time to look round and think what you will do next.'

Noel was deeply touched, and thanked the boy warmly.

'I must get work of some kind as soon as I can,' he replied, 'but I am just as grateful to you all the same. You are a brick.'

Noel returned to London to look for work. He tramped the streets, and he answered advertisements. In the course of a few days he was offered a position as waiter in a restaurant, where a knowledge of French was desirable ; as an attendant in a lunatic asylum, and as assistant to an undertaker. He declined all these brilliant positions, and found himself, after a great expenditure of energy, shoe-leather, and postage-stamps, just where he was before.

He was beginning to think that he should have to make up his mind to be Mr. Abdy's clerk, when he chanced one morning to enter a little coffee-house in the Strand to get his frugal luncheon. There was a paper lying on the table called the 'South African Empire,' and Noel scanned it with languid interest while sipping his coffee. Presently, however, he stumbled upon something that attracted his attention. It was a letter to the Editor on the subject of emigration, written by a colonist, and giving a great many useful suggestions and much information. The writer strongly deprecated the flooding of the country with clerks and college-educated men, who had never learned except from books, and of whom there were more than enough in all the towns already ; but he went on to say that for active and healthy young fellows, who would turn their hands to anything, and were not above any kind of honest work, there were plenty of openings.

The letter was merely signed G. N., and there was no shadow of memory or association to bring for a moment to Noel's mind the image of Gronow Neilson, who was, in fact, the writer.

The letter brought some new ideas to him, nevertheless, and he read it carefully over again.

'I will emigrate,' he said to himself. 'How much better than poking along in a stuffy office in London! I don't believe I mind what I do. Out there no one will know me, I can make a fresh start altogether, and I shall have a better chance.'

He turned to the front of the paper for the shipping advertisements, and, after studying them for a while, came to the conclusion that the Australian boats were the best and cheapest. He noted down the address of the office, paid his infinitesimal bill, and went out.

His first proceeding was to return to the house in Mayfair, to empty out of a drawer all the jewellery he possessed, three or four rings, two sets of shirt-studs, sleeve-links, and tie pins; and keeping the plain silver ones for wear, to carry all the rest to a jeweller, to whom he sold them for a fair sum.

After that he went into the City to the shipping office, and took a third-class passage in a large Australian boat to Capetown. He could have afforded a second-class passage, but reflected that it would be wise to land in South Africa with a certain amount of money in his pocket.

Necessity had taught him more wisdom in a week than ease and security had taught him in twenty years.

After taking his passage he went to Mr. Abdy's office, which was near by, and found the old gentleman just leaving it.

He told him what he had done.

'I am afraid you will find it rather a rough life,' observed the lawyer.

'Life is likely to be rather rough for me anywhere, I fancy, just at present,' answered Noel cheerfully.

'You will want a little money to start with,' urged Mr. Abdy.

'I have a little. I sold everything I had, except the clothes I must wear, and one or two books and things of no value. I have taken my passage, and I shall leave England quite free of debt.'

'Well, that is a good beginning,' said the lawyer heartily, 'and I respect you for it. When do you sail?'

'This day week.'

'So soon? You must leave me some address, so that I can hear of you. I shall be anxious to know how you get on.'

'It is very kind of you to take so much interest in me,' said Noel. 'Of course I cannot give you an address now, but when I get anything to do out there I will write to you.'

'Don't wait for that,' said Mr. Abdy rather drily, 'let me know of your safe arrival.'

'That reminds me,' observed Noel, 'I must tell you that I have decided to drop the name of Lanyon. I have no claim to it whatever, certainly not now, and I do not care to bear it any longer.'

'I can understand your feeling,' replied the lawyer, 'but what are you going to call yourself then?'

'Johnson,' returned Noel; 'my father's name is quite as likely to have been John as anything else,' he added rather bitterly.

'Your position is really a very sad one,' said the lawyer sympathetically; 'it is hard for a young man to know nothing of his parentage, and then to be adopted for so long, and cast off again.'

'Miss Lanyon had much better have left me in the orphanage,' remarked Noel, 'where I should have been brought up to earn my own living, than to have educated me to be useless for so many years, and then turned me adrift on the world.'

'Quite true,' agreed Mr. Abdy; 'but then the old lady was certainly not responsible for her actions at the last.'

'I cannot understand why she kept that old will all those years,' said Noel, 'if, as you say, she made another in my favour. Did she expect to change her mind?'

'Well, I suppose you were on trial to a certain extent,' replied the lawyer, 'and besides that, I am pretty sure that Miss Calthrop had a hand in it. She certainly had an eye on the property herself.'

Noel reflected.

'Oh, I don't think that,' he said presently. 'I am not fond of Miss Calthrop, but I think she is a harmless old body enough, not a schemer. And anyhow, she has gained nothing. She expected a larger legacy, no doubt, but then she was justified in doing so.'

'Well, she cannot do you any more harm, at all events, Mr. Johnson,' said the lawyer.

'He that is down need fear no fall,' quoted Noel smiling, 'and you evidently think that in Johnson I have touched the lowest depth?'

'I hope so,' replied the lawyer gravely. 'Well, I must wish you good evening, Mr. Lanyon—Johnson, at least. I shall see you again before you go.'

'Of course,' said Noel; 'I was hoping you would come and see me off. I don't suppose anyone else will.'

When Noel told Miss Calthrop that he was going to South Africa, she remarked :

'Are you really? Then you had better try and find the heiress out there and marry her.'

Noel stared at her, and burst out laughing.

'A capital idea!' he exclaimed. 'Miss Calthrop, you are an original genius.'

'Well, if you succeed,' replied Miss Calthrop good-humouredly, 'I shall expect you to remember me.'

'Certainly,' agreed Noel; 'five thousand pounds, no less, shall be the reward of your excellent suggestion.'

'First catch your—heiress,' said Miss Calthrop, aspirating the 'h' to emphasise the horrible pun, at which Noel made a wry face.

'That's it,' he returned. 'South Africa is a large country and I might waste a good deal of time and money in hunting for Miss Lester, only to find her engaged or married to someone else after all.'

'That is hardly likely if she is only sixteen,' said Miss Calthrop unguardedly.

'How do you know she is only sixteen?' asked Noel surprised.

Miss Calthrop saw that she had made a slip, but she quickly set it right.

'Mr. Abdy said she was under age, you know,' she replied, 'and afterwards he mentioned the year of her father's marriage, which he happened to know.'

'Well, she is a lucky girl, that's all I know,' Noel concluded with a sigh.

Miss Calthrop returned to Brighton the next day, where she intended to live. She took quite a friendly leave of Noel, who escorted her to the station.

'She is not a bad old sort,' he said to himself, as the train steamed away. 'I don't believe she ever tried to do me any harm.'

Left alone in the dreary little house in Mayfair, Noel felt very glad that he had only a few more days to spend there. He realised that it would have been very hard for him to continue living in London, or even in England, cut off from all the society and the pleasures to which he had been accustomed. The idea of the voyage and the far-off new country became more and more attractive to him. He had no regret in leaving home, he was full of confidence in himself and his future; in short, he felt that he had already quite got over his misfortune, that now he was going to stand on his own feet, and prove himself a man among men.

The last few days were fully occupied in packing and making preparations, in providing and arranging his modest outfit, and in taking leave of the friends—they were not very many—to whom he really cared to say farewell. He did not promise to keep up any correspondence; he wished to leave his old life entirely behind him, and to start a new one quite unencumbered with old associations. At twenty that is not such a hard thing to do. The roots of existence and habit have not struck so deep, and to tear them up is not so painful as in later life.

On the last evening before he left Noel was sitting in his 'den'—a little room adjoining his bedroom, which had always been reserved for his special use—turning out everything that was left (which was not much), destroying old letters and bills, and making a general clearance. Amongst other things he found, on the top shelf of a cupboard, a box with various old childish relics in it: a little clock,

which had ticked away bravely, as warranted, for five years, and then come to grief, and been pulled to pieces and dissected limb from limb ; an abortive collection of stamps ; another of coins, which had never got further than five ; a broken pencil-case ; a packet of old Christmas cards, and so forth.

Noel turned up the box and shook out the contents over the table ; as they scattered about, his eye suddenly fell on something that he had neither seen nor thought of for many a long year. It was a tiny leaden anchor, very neatly made, with a little ring at the top, to which was still attached a fragment of rotten thread.

Noel held it up between his finger and thumb, and as he thoughtfully gazed upon it, from somewhere in the recesses of his brain, where old associations stow themselves away, but are never lost, there rose up before him a picture of the scene, as distinct in every detail as if it had passed but yesterday.

The long, bare workshop, the carpenter's bench, the tools lying about, the unfinished pieces of rough work ; the floor littered with shavings and sawdust ; the unglazed window, with the low evening sunlight streaming through, and deadening the glare of the leaping flame on the forge ; the big, strong, boyish figure bending over the basin in which the melted lead was cooling ; the grave face, with keen short-sighted eyes, and fair smooth hair ; the long, skilful fingers moulding the little anchor with as much care and patience as if it had been some important work : all these Noel could see with inward vision as plainly as he had seen them with his outward eye. For the moment he was transported back to the spot, and seemed to feel the shavings under him as he sat at Gronow's feet, and looked up with childish reverence and devotion into his face.

' That fellow was awfully good to me ! ' Noel murmured to himself, as he fingered the little leaden anchor almost tenderly. ' I wonder what has become of him ! I believe that I really cared more for him than I have ever done for anyone else since.'

He sat musing for a few minutes, and then, with a smile at his own sentimentality, he slipped the anchor on to the

swivel of his watch chain. It was the old silver watch of his boyhood, one that he had bought with his pocket-money, after having his watch stolen in the streets long ago ; he had no other now, having sold his gold one.

'There let it hang,' he said, with a sigh, for which he could have given no reason, 'perhaps it will bring me luck. And if ever I meet Gronow Neilson again I will show it to him, and see if he remembers it too. Who knows? Stranger things have happened.'

Very true. And stranger things shall yet happen, Noel Johnson, before you have done with that leaden anchor.

Mr. Abdy went down to the docks the next day to see the last of his young friend. Although it was the middle of July, it was a cold, dull afternoon ; a drizzling rain fell steadily, a chilly wind searched all the corners ; and sky, river, docks, and shipping were all of a uniform grey.

There were not many passengers on board the *Californian*, nor many people to see them off ; a meagre band played 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Home, Sweet Home' in dismal strains on the quay ; on board there was the usual uncomfortable confusion that prevails before the passengers and their belongings have fitted into their respective niches.

'This seems rather a melancholy send-off,' observed Mr. Abdy, contemplating the scene with a comprehensive gaze which took in all the surroundings.

'Never mind,' responded Noel cheerfully, 'one is all the more reconciled to leaving these gloomy shores and sailing away south into the sunshine.'

'Well, I hope you will have plenty of sunshine,' said the old lawyer cordially, as he grasped Noel's hand ; 'but remember, there must be bad weather sometimes, and keep a look out for storms.'

'I am ready for them,' replied Noel, and waved his hand as the old man descended the gangway, and turned on the quay for a last look. A few minutes later the huge vessel began slowly to glide out of the dock ; the strains of the dismal band, and the cheers of the onlookers died on the murky air ; Noel Lanyon was dead with the dead past, and Noel Johnson was sailing away to a new and untried future

## CHAPTER XIII

‘Before, behind, and all around,  
 Floats and swings the horizon’s bound,  
 Seems at its distant rim to rise  
 And climb the crystal wall of the skies,  
 And then again to turn and sink,  
 As if we could slide from its outer brink.’

NOEL’s cheerful and self-confident mood collapsed like a soap-bubble when he was confronted with the reality of third-class accommodation. As a matter of fact, it was very good third-class accommodation ; but to Noel it seemed something like being put in the Zoological Gardens. His berth was one of six in a roomy cabin, four of the others being occupied ; there was one washing basin between all of them, but there was also a bath-room, in which Noel performed all his ablutions, for he could not brook the idea of making his toilette in front of the four young workmen who were his room-mates. He was not fond of early rising, but he took to it now for the sake of having the bath-room first in the morning, and getting dressed while his companions were still asleep. The deck was the only tolerable place, nor was that always tolerable to a young fellow accustomed to the best society. However, he spent all his time there, and would gladly have slept on deck, for the nights in the cabin were detestable to him, but he found it was not allowed.

The two days in the Channel were misty, rainy, and calm. The third and fourth days were pitch and toss in the Bay of Biscay. Noel held out as long as he could, but he was forced at last to take refuge in his berth, and then only did he feel that his troubles hitherto had been light indeed. The sea-sickness he could have borne with stoicism ; but the various adjuncts—the three sea-sick companions alongside of him, in the last stages of misery ; the complete absence of comfort, refinement, and, above all, privacy ; the unspeakable odours

wafted from the kitchen and the engine-room, the constant noise of tramping on the deck overhead, the beat of the engines, the wash of the water, and, to crown all, as it grew rougher, the closing of the porthole: all these things combined made him think that South Africa ought to be heaven itself to make it worth while getting there, and that he would much prefer to jump overboard as soon as he should feel capable of any performance so lively as jumping.

This lasted until the fifth day, when they reached Madeira, and a blessed calm supervened. Noel was perfectly well at once, and decided to put off jumping overboard for the present.

He would have liked to go ashore, but for several reasons he did not. For one thing it would have cost money, which he did not wish to spend, and for another, he did not care to go alone, and he had not yet made friends with a soul on board. Moreover, the scene on deck was very entertaining to one who had never witnessed it before. The third-class passengers were free of the whole vessel for the time being, and Noel went forward to watch the diving, and to examine the basket work, embroidery, &c., which a number of excited Portuguese half-castes were trying to sell at exorbitant prices. Noel was debating within himself whether he could indulge in a Madeira chair, for he was badly in want of a deck-chair, when he suddenly became aware of a tall, thin, grey-haired man who seemed to be observing him with great interest.

Noel had not seen this man before, and concluded that he must be a first or second class passenger. He was somewhat surprised, therefore, when the man came up to him and addressed him.

'Excuse me,' he said courteously, 'but are you travelling in the third-class?'

'Yes, I am,' replied Noel shortly.

'I noticed you when you came on board,' continued the stranger, 'because I recognised Mr. Abdy, who was with you. He had been doing some business for me.'

'Indeed,' returned Noel without interest.

'I do not ask from impertinence,' said the other, observ-

ing his manner, 'but because I thought I might be of use to you. You are going to Australia ?'

'No, to South Africa,' replied Noel.

'Indeed !' and the man's face lighted up, 'that is where my home is ; but I have brothers in Australia.'

There was a pause ; Noel's silence was unresponsive.

'I am a South African by birth,' the stranger went on presently, 'and I have lived in the country all my life. If I can give you introductions, or help you in any way, I should be pleased to do it.'

Noel was feeling desperately lonely, and he could not help thawing under this man's persistent friendliness. His manner was unconventional, but not impertinent.

'I should be very glad of introductions,' he said, 'for I know no one out there ; but, as a preliminary, I think we should introduce ourselves.'

The other smiled, evidently much relieved at Noel's change of attitude.

'Right you are. My name is Mayer, I am just a farmer, in the Colesberg district. That is a good way up country, but I shall be glad to see you there if you like to come.'

'Thank you,' said Noel, still somewhat on the defensive. 'My name is Johnson. I expect I shall have to take what I can get in the way of work out there. I suppose there is plenty of work to be had ?'

'For those that can do it, yes,' replied Mr. Mayer rather drily ; 'it depends upon what you can do, and whether the climate suits you.'

'I don't think I mind what I do,' replied Noel, but his tone was not so confident as it had been a week ago. 'What I *can* do is another question. I have not learned any profession yet.'

'That was why I took notice of you,' observed Mr. Mayer, 'when I saw you go into the third-class, and I felt sorry for you because you were alone, and anyone could see by the looks of you that you were a gentleman, and had been used to something very different.'

'My purse does not correspond with my looks unfortunately,' said Noel smiling, but not very cheerfully.

'Well, it's rough on a young fellow like you,' said Mayer sympathetically. 'Still, you *are* young, that's a great thing, and you have lots of time to learn. What did you think of trying to do?'

'I haven't thought much about it,' replied Noel; 'I mean to look round when I get there. I should like something out-of-doors best, I think. Does farming pay well?'

'It pays well with some people, and with some it doesn't,' answered Mayer, with a rather comical look; 'and, anyway, it means lots of hard work. But then, so does anything else, for that matter.'

The parties who had been ashore now began to return, and the sellers of Madeira wares received notice to pack up their goods and depart, which they did with the most extraordinary celerity.

Noel turned his attention to the chairs again.

'You can get one much cheaper by waiting to the last moment,' said Mayer, and Noel presently found that he was right. He purchased one, and returned to his own part of the ship with it.

The meals were a great trial to Noel. He had not an indiscriminating appetite, and was used to rather select living; but the plain fare did not repel him so much as the coarse table-linen, the dulness of the spoons and forks, and, above all, the manners of the other passengers at table.

To sit down to a meal with dirty hands, or smelling of stale tobacco, to put your knife in your mouth, and also dip it into the salt-cellar—these were some of the unrefinements of life of which Noel had perhaps vaguely heard, but with which he had never yet come in contact; nor had he realised that to be poor, and to rough it out in the world, might involve such experiences.

'If I am always to live among people of this sort,' he said to himself, 'I shall never make any friends or have any pleasure, that is quite certain. I had better have died in the Bay of Biscay, as I thought I should one day.'

It did not occur to him that if he did not have any pleasure he might still try to give some. That was an idea that was also outside his experience, at present. Some of his

fellow-passengers tried to make advances to him from time to time ; but, though he answered them politely when they spoke to him, he held himself quite aloof from all of them, and they naturally concluded that he was stuck up, and thought himself too good for them—which was not far from the truth.

However, as the big boat, with its variously assorted human family, steamed on steadily south, and the northern constellations dipped below the horizon, Noel, in spite of uncongenial surroundings, began to feel the witchery of the voyage, and the solemn charm of the ocean. It was at night especially that he liked to stand in the stern and watch the phosphorus, like living flames flashing and dancing in the dark rushing water and the eddying foam. He liked to look up to the illimitable vault, sown thick with serene immaculate stars, sweeping on their immeasurable way so far from all human pain and fretting.

He liked to look away to the dim horizon and think of the many thousand leagues of ocean, and the many thousand ships sailing over it in every direction, each with its living freight of hearts, and hopes, and fears. There was a magic in the warm, dark air, the vast space, the great peopled silence in which nature is always at work, destroying life and recreating it. And alone, in the midst of this magic, shadowy world, this little moving island of planks and iron, with steaming chimneys and electric light, and short-lived human beings with their every-day routine of meals, and work, and play, beating steadily on its unmarked path, straight and surely towards its goal ; a thousand miles from land, yet travelling without fail towards the moment when the expected land would rise above the horizon. All this was new and pleasant to Noel ; it fired his imagination, and filled him with vague dreams of the future ; and when the band was playing, or when some of his companions were singing, not inharmoniously, the last music-hall ballad, or some of Moody and Sankey's hymns, the sounds chimed in with his thoughts, and with the fascination of the tropical night.

One evening the third-class passengers got up a fancy

dress dance. There was a very pretty girl who was going out to Tasmania as a domestic servant, and who had tried several times to enter into conversation with Noel, evidently attracted by his handsome face and gentlemanly manners. On this occasion she came and begged him to take part in the dance.

'I am afraid I have nothing with me that would do for fancy dress at all,' said Noel.

'Oh, that does not matter! Borrow a steward's uniform, or some clothes from a sailor.'

Noel did not relish this idea, however.

'I would rather look on, and watch you,' he said good-naturedly.

'But at all events you will dance? Do, now! I am sure you can dance,' urged the girl.

'I can dance,' Noel admitted, with poignant recollections of certain London ball-rooms, 'but I have never tried to dance on board ship, and I have only thick shoes.'

He did his best to get out of it, and ended in a half promise; in consequence of which he found himself beguiled into a couple of dances, one with the girl above mentioned, who had got herself up with really good taste as Erin, in green and white; the other with a stout and elderly female, who was fearfully and wonderfully attired in Union Jacks, supposed to represent Britannia. This second dance was too much for Noel, who retired to the gangway, where several of the first and second class passengers were assembled, looking on with great enjoyment.

'This ought to be something in your line, Mr. Johnson,' said Mayer's voice behind him.

Noel started a little. He was not yet altogether accustomed to his new name, and sometimes did not readily respond to it.

'Well—I am not quite in the humour for it,' he said carelessly.

'If it was in the first-class now,' observed Mr. Mayer, 'it would suit your humour better.'

'It would be a different thing, of course,' replied Noel rather sharply, 'you must admit that yourself.'

'I do admit it,' said Mayer; 'in fact, I believe I was the first to make the remark. But I meant no offence.'

Mayer was travelling in the second class, but he came through every day, and sat talking to Noel or promenading the deck with him, sometimes for a couple of hours. Noel was grateful to the man, and liked him on the whole. He was quite a character, shrewd and intelligent, plain spoken, but never offensive, and full of useful, practical information. Of book-learning he had little enough.

'You see, Mr. Johnson,' he said to him the day after the fancy dress dance, 'it is just as well for you to have a little experience of this sort. I don't say that you will have to go third class all your life, but you will probably have to do a good deal of it for the present; and you can't always keep all your fellow-travellers at arm's length.'

'But if I have to travel third class I don't want to become third class,' observed Noel.

'Of course you don't, and there is no need that you should; but I warn you, you will find that there is no democracy like a colony. There is no difference in blood with us, except the difference between black blood and white; and a man is no better than his neighbour. Look at me, for instance. Of course, I am not your equal in education; I have never been to college, or to big London parties; but that makes no difference out there where you are going to, and you'll be far happier, believe me, if you leave that sort of thing behind you.'

'If I can always associate with men like you I shall have nothing to complain of,' said Noel courteously, 'but I cannot pretend to make friends with men who use coarse language and don't wash themselves.'

'As regards the coarse language, I am at one with you,' responded Mayer, 'it is a thing I never put up with; but as regards the washing,' he added, smiling rather grimly, 'however much you may object to it, I am afraid you will have to shake a dirty hand now and then.'

'I won't shake more than I can help, anyway,' said Noel with decision.

Mayer shook his head, still smiling.

'Ah, well, we none of us learn anything except by experience,' he remarked, 'and you will find your own way much better than I can find it for you. But remember, I shall be glad to see you any time at my place, morning, noon, or night. There will always be a welcome for you, and if I can put you in the way of work I will. You have my address ?'

'Yes, I have, and I shall not forget you, Mr. Mayer,' said Noel heartily. 'The time may come when I shall be glad of your help, and in any case I shall feel that I have at all events one friend in the colony.'

'Oh, you will make plenty of friends with that bonny face of yours,' said Mayer, 'but you want to make a living first. I should advise you to try and get into one of the big stores in Capetown. It is not so easy, but your manners and appearance are in your favour. It would be indoor work at first, but you might get employed as a traveller afterwards, and see something of the country.'

'Stand behind a counter, though?' asked Noel doubtfully.

'What's the matter with the counter?' returned Mayer. 'I thought you did not mind what you did.'

'Certainly, it is no good minding when one is a pauper,' observed Noel bitterly.

'How did it come about?' Mayer asked, 'that is, if you don't mind telling me.'

Noel related his history to him briefly.

'Well, that *was* hard lines, I own,' Mayer admitted with hearty sympathy; 'and look here, young fellow, you've shown real pluck in starting out like this to work your own way, instead of trying to sponge on your friends, and running into debt. Keep it up, go on as you've begun, and you will do well yet. Only put away the notion that you're too good for anything or anybody. Give your best to everything you do, and everyone you have to work with, and you will see how it will help you on.'

'I have not found out what my best is yet,' sighed Noel, 'but I suppose I shall soon.'

The latter part of the voyage was cold and windy, for it

was the beginning of August, which is usually the coldest month of the South African winter. Noel was in good health, and did not mind the weather; but he was very weary of the voyage, which he could only have enjoyed under more favourable—that is first-class—circumstances, and he was greatly rejoiced when the twenty-first day brought them safely to their wished-for haven.

They entered Table Bay about eight o'clock in the evening. It was a gloriously clear night, moonless, but brilliant with stars, which drew paths of light on the peaceful waters. The majestic outline of Table Mountain stood out sharp and black against the indigo sky, and embraced in its sweeping curves the many lights of Capetown that twinkled down to the water's edge. A broad beam of light as they passed indicated the lighthouse on Robben Island, and others shot forth from the numerous points which in old days made all this coast so formidable to mariners.

Noel felt his spirits rise again as he gazed eagerly towards the new land, the first land he had seen for a fortnight, and to him a land of promise. He felt a return of the cheery, self-confident hope which had animated him when he left England; and as the longed-for shore drew nearer and nearer, on which that untried future awaited him, he leaned over the rail with eager eyes, murmuring to himself some lines he had once learned and half forgotten :

‘ Lo, if in dreams some truths we chanced to see,  
Now in the truth some dreams may haply be.’

## CHAPTER XIV

'Deep as I felt, and stern and strong,  
In words which Prudence smothered long,  
My soul spoke out against the wrong.'

'Smile, and we smile, the lords of many lands ;  
Frown, and we smile, the lords of our own hands.'

IN a small but comfortable room in a little house in a suburb of Johannesburg Alice Neilson sat at work. The room was simply but tastefully furnished in colonial style, with no superfluity of carpets or curtains. The stained and polished floor was strewn with two or three skins ; the windows were draped with art muslin ; a few good pictures adorned the walls ; it was a room inhabited not by wealthy but well-to-do folk, and had an attractive and homelike air.

It was now seven years since Gronow and Alice, as man and wife, had left English shores, which they had not in that time revisited. They had been years of varying fortune, of much hard work with much happiness, of some success and some disappointment and failure.

Their first anxiety had been about Nora, who managed to get an attack of congestion of the lungs on the voyage out. Alice and Mr. Lester had to remain a while with her in Capetown, Gronow being obliged to go on to Johannesburg to take up his work—a separation which both of them felt keenly. The next difficulty was, that the doctor said Nora must not live in town, but in a healthy country place, and must not go to school for a year, but rest entirely and live out of doors. Then the lung would quite recover.

Gronow's position compelled him to live in town, and, by consequence, his wife, too. However, they had a piece of good fortune here in becoming acquainted with a nice English family who had a farm a few miles out of Johannesburg, and who were pleased to take Nora as a boarder. Here she

became perfectly well and strong, and had such a happy home that she remained for four years, learning with the children of the family, who had a tutor. As for Mr. Lester, he had come on board ship with a sum of money which no one asked him how he had acquired ; he gambled, and made others gamble to such an extent on the voyage that the captain put a stop to it. He was very good to Nora during her illness, and more help to Alice than he had ever been before ; and, finally, after loafing about Johannesburg for some weeks, he tumbled into a situation as bookkeeper, being quite as expert at keeping books as he was at most other things. He kept this situation for eighteen months, and finally lost it through irregularity in attendance. After that he continued to lead the same kind of life—loafing most of the time, but getting jobs of work occasionally, and showing splendid capacity for a few weeks. In a town like Johannesburg there were too many temptations for him to keep straight for long together.

He continued to receive regularly his remittances from Miss Lanyon's lawyers, so that he never came quite to the lowest ebb ; moreover, he always paid for Nora, being steadily kept up to the point by Gronow, who was quite determined not to begin taking that charge upon himself if he could possibly help it. He knew that if he once did it, it would become a precedent, and he would have twice the difficulty in getting the money out of Lester.

He now realised what Alice had gone through in former years to get money out of her step-father, and he rejoiced at being able to relieve her of so unwelcome a task. Alice, on her part, felt as if she had not a care in the world now that she had a husband beside her who was so strong and so ready to relieve her of care.

The two young people had a very happy home. They had one child, a fine boy of three years old, who was now playing at his mother's feet. Shortly before his birth they had moved into the house they now occupied, and at the same time Nora had rejoined them and had lived with them ever since.

Colonial life suited Nora exactly. She seemed to have

some qualities of the gipsy in her, for she was never so happy as when roughing it out in the veldt. She soon learned to ride and drive, to swim, to climb, to be more of a boy than a girl. She proved herself to be fearless and self-reliant, with no regard for appearances, and a happy confidence that anything that went wrong would come right of itself.

Nora did not take after her father in the matter of brains, or in his love of books ; she gave as little time to them as she could manage ; but she was very capable in practical matters, a capital housekeeper for her years, always ready with a way out of a difficulty, always cool and sensible in an emergency. Alice found her an unfailing help and comfort in the house, although her wild spirits and her remarkable independence sometimes made her a cause of anxiety. Perhaps the greatest burden of work and care during these seven years had fallen on Gronow, though his wife was always loyally ready to share it with him.

Gronow had kept his ambition steadily in view, and by dint of almost incredible toil and perseverance had practically qualified himself as an engineer. He had formed the purpose of leaving Trent Brothers after five years and going to England for six months or a year to qualify technically ; but this he was obliged, in part, to give up. He did, indeed, sever his connection with Trent Brothers and set up for himself, obtaining a good position at one of the mines, but the trip to England proved to be beyond his means. He would not go alone, and if he took Alice and the child he must also take Nora. So that had to be given up.

Since then darker clouds had gathered. Gronow, like all other Englishmen in Johannesburg, was hampered and oppressed by the despotism and injustice of a tyrannical Government. As soon as he entered upon public work he had to encounter public disabilities. It was the heavy taxes and the cost of living that had prevented him from laying by enough money to go to England. It was the systematic oppression of the Outlander that hampered him in his work and hindered his progress. While foreman at Trent's, Gronow had invented an improvement in the water-boring

machines, of which they turned out a great many at the workshop. He offered the patent to the Transvaal Government, who would have taken it if they could have had it at their own price, but that was not Gronow's price. After that he offered it to the Cape Government, but they could not afford it either; there were too many Dutch members. So Gronow kept his invention to himself, thinking to try his fortune at home with it, whenever he should be able to go home.

Then came the Jameson Raid, bringing days of darkness and terror which Alice would never forget.

Nora was full of excitement, really hoping that there would be 'a regular flare-up.' She was too much of a child to realise what it would mean. Alice trembled for the safety of her husband and of many friends, and suffered much in the months that followed from suspense and anxiety.

Gronow, however, had taken no prominent part in the movements for reform, and did not belong to the Reform Committee. He did not altogether approve of their methods, and he believed their efforts to be absolutely useless.

'They might as well send up their petitions to a Chinese idol,' he said; 'they would have as much chance of redress. The only cure for radical corruption is radical extirpation.'

'But that means war,' said Alice.

'Well, it will come to war one of these days.'

'Oh, Gronow! war is such a terrible thing!'

'Oppression and injustice are more dreadful, dear.'

'And yet you endure them every day without opening your mouth,' put in Nora discontentedly.

'I see no good in opening my mouth at present,' returned Gronow, smiling at her. 'I will open it fast enough when the time comes.'

It was a great grievance to Nora that Gronow kept himself so much in the background all this time. She would have liked to see him throw himself with ardour into the cause of reform, as she would have done in his place. It was not that he was afraid, for no one could have suspected Gronow of cowardice; nor was it that he truckled to the Government;

on the contrary, he went his own way as steadily and as indifferently as he had always done. It was simply that he was too hard-headed and too reasonable to commit himself to any course of action from which he could foresee no lasting results ; and he was not liable to be carried away by a generous enthusiasm for a hopeless cause.

Even Alice in her heart of hearts sometimes regretted this a little. She worshipped her husband, but she was not blind to his faults, and she felt now and then that he ought to be a little more emotional to be quite perfect. In his home certainly he was always tender and patient ; indeed, when it came to bringing up the child, Alice was more inclined to be strict than he was. Contrasting his own great strength with that baby helplessness, he was afraid of being too harsh.

And when the evil days came, and the Reformers languished in prison, and paid exorbitant sums of money to atone for the crime of having desired justice, Alice rejoiced with a thankful heart that Gronow's name was comparatively obscure, and that the Government had no hold upon him.

Neither was Gronow found wanting when he could be of real service. During those days of terror and suspense he was out from morning till night, and often from night till morning, helping to keep order, and to restore confidence in the panic-stricken city ; and Gronow was a man who could exercise a tremendous influence if he chose.

The year following the Raid was a somewhat brighter one. Little Gronow began to walk and to talk, and was a never-ceasing delight to his parents and to his aunt Nora. In public affairs, the Queen's Jubilee introduced a gleam of fictitious sunshine, soon to be quenched in the gloom of gathering war-clouds. When the Outlanders sent up their monster petition to the Queen, Gronow appended his name to it readily.

'There is some sense in that,' he said, 'that is going to the fountain-head, and may hasten matters a little.'

Alice sat thinking of these things and working, now and then laying the work aside at some imperious demand from

the little Gronow. Her private life was so happy that she seldom gave way to a dread of the future, though it hung like a distant cloud on the horizon. She could hear Nora singing overhead in the bedroom, and she smiled at the sound of the girl's fresh, happy voice. Alice reckoned it one of her greatest blessings that Nora's health was now entirely restored, and no weakness of the lungs remained.

Her education had been somewhat desultory, and Gronow and his wife had often discussed the possibility of sending her away for two or three years to a thoroughly good school. Up to the present, however, they had not been able to afford it, and Nora herself was quite untroubled about the matter, being content with the education she had. Presently, a firm, quick step came along the road, and the house door was opened. Little Gronow sprang up, crying 'Dada'; and Alice looked up with the welcoming smile which her husband never missed when he came in. He sat down and took the boy on his knee, but Alice perceived at once that something troubled him.

'What is the news, Gronow?' she asked cheerfully.

'That the Industrial Commission is a failure,' he replied.  
'I knew it would be, and yet I am disappointed.'

'But did not the Volksraad consider their report at all?'

'They considered it, yes; but they won't *do* anything. It is not a question of the Volksraad. The State here is one man, that is Kruger; and he will see us all hanged before he will do anything for us.'

'Are you afraid of the mines being closed down?' Alice asked anxiously.

'I fear it will come to that—with some of them.'

'Oh, Gronow! Not yours?'

'I cannot say, dear, but I hope not. We are all working together now to keep ourselves going. I have not heard a word of closing down yet.'

'Perhaps the Home Government will interfere,' observed Alice. 'Kruger might give way to pressure from that quarter.'

'I am afraid that pressure of any kind will only have the effect of squeezing him more firmly into his present shape,'

replied Gronow, smiling rather sadly, as he put the boy down again, and rose.

'Are you going out again, Gronow?'

'Just to the post-office. The English mail is in and will be delivered over the counter at five o'clock.'

He went out, and directly afterwards Nora came into the room.

'I thought I heard Gronow,' she said.

'Yes, he is gone out again to fetch the English mail.'

'Oh—well, the English mail has no interest for me,' returned Nora, throwing herself on the floor and commencing a romp with her small nephew.

'Gronow is anxious about public affairs,' observed Alice; 'he says things are looking very bad.'

'Why don't they have a big war and have done with it?' said Nora. 'I wish they would.'

'Nora! you don't know what you are saying. To look at it only from a selfish point of view, we should be ruined.'

'Well, we can all work.'

'There would be no work for us to do while the war lasted. And Gronow would perhaps go and fight.'

'That would be horrid, certainly,' agreed Nora, 'and of course he would go. I know I would if I were a boy instead of a stupid girl.'

Gronow presently returned with the mail.

Alice corresponded with no one in England except the Forrests, and Gronow's letters were only on business. To-day, however, there was a letter for Nora—a long blue envelope with a big seal, and a great number of stamps.

'Here is an important-looking document for you, Nora,' said Gronow, giving it to her. 'I don't know what it can be.'

'For me?' exclaimed Nora. 'Surely there must be some mistake. "Miss Nora Lester"—how very odd!'

'There is one for your father in the same handwriting,' observed Gronow, glancing at Alice, who was evidently puzzled also. Mr. Lester, whose dwelling place was uncertain, generally had his letters addressed to Gronow's house.

There was a few minutes' silence, while Gronow

perused his correspondence, and then Alice exclaimed in a tone of astonishment :

‘ Why, Nora ! What is the matter ? ’

Gronow looked up. Nora was actually pale, and her hand trembled.

‘ What does it mean, Gronow ? ’ she asked in a frightened voice, holding out the letter to him ; ‘ I can’t understand it.’

Gronow read it with lips pressed tightly together.

‘ What is it, Gronow ? ’ asked Alice impatiently. ‘ Do tell me. What has happened ? ’

‘ Someone has left Nora thirty thousand pounds,’ he replied deliberately.

Alice gasped as if he had thrown a bucket of cold water over her.

‘ Thirty—thousand—pounds ! ’ she repeated incredulously.

‘ But who is she ? ’ cried Nora, ‘ who is Miss Lanyon ? I never heard of her in all my life ! ’

‘ I expect your father will be able to tell us that,’ replied Gronow thoughtfully, looking at Mr. Lester’s letter which lay on the table. Alice looked at it too.

‘ I know that handwriting ! ’ she exclaimed ; ‘ it is the lawyer from whom Mr. Lester has always received money at regular intervals. And that is their seal on Nora’s envelope.’

‘ What is this big document ? ’ asked Gronow. ‘ Oh, I see, they have sent you a copy of the will.’

‘ I can’t make it out the least bit,’ said Nora, who was beginning to recover herself ; ‘ it must be a hoax.’

‘ Hardly,’ replied Gronow. ‘ I think we must wait for your father to clear up the mystery for us.’

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Lester himself knocked at the door and walked in immediately.

‘ I heard the mail was in,’ he said, after a hasty greeting, ‘ and I guessed you would fetch the letters. Any for me ? ’

Before anyone could reply Nora exclaimed :

‘ Father, who is Miss Lanyon ? ’

‘ Miss Lanyon ? ’ repeated Lester, somewhat taken aback. ‘ She is an old friend of mine.’

‘ I never heard you mention her name,’ said Nora.

'Well, I have not seen her for years,' replied Lester evasively (he had never set eyes on her in his life), 'and she is a rich woman in society, whereas I am a poor man, and out of it. But why do you ask?'

'She has left Nora a large fortune,' remarked Gronow gravely.

'The deuce she has!' exclaimed Lester, moved from his ordinary imperturbability. 'Is she dead, then?'

'But why in the world should she have done it?' put in Nora, who did not seem at present much elated by the news.

'I see there is a condition attached to it, though,' continued Gronow, who was studying the will; 'should Christian Dupleix, or his heir, turn up, he is to have half the money.'

'There is something about that in the letter,' said Nora. 'The lawyer says that this Christian Dupleix has been advertised for for years, and has never been heard of, so most likely he is dead and has no heir.'

'Christian Dupleix!' repeated Alice, in a puzzled tone, looking at her step-father.

'Well, that accounts for it,' observed Lester, who had been rapidly collecting his thoughts; 'Christian Dupleix, of whom you have heard me speak, was Miss Lanyon's nephew, I believe the only relation she had. Of course, he had offended her desperately, and she had turned him out of doors. That was the fellow that ruined me, and I suppose she has conceived some idea of reparation in leaving this money to Nora.'

'How did she know that her nephew had ruined you?' asked Alice rather sharply.

'Oh, I suppose she kept herself informed of his doings,' replied Lester carelessly; 'and then she knew something of my family at home.'

He did not want to tell more lies than he could help, because he did not know what might be in the lawyer's letter to Nora.

'At all events she did not know what ultimately became of him,' observed Gronow, 'because at the time of making this will she did not know whether he was alive or dead.'

'I don't believe anyone did know,' said Lester; 'I never did.'

'Then it was Miss Lanyon who sent you money?' Alice said suddenly.

'Yes,' replied Lester, not disconcerted; 'she took it upon herself to pay off what she could of Christian's debts, of which his debts to me were perhaps the most dishonourable. She paid me a yearly interest on the amount, which, as she was very rich, I felt myself quite justified in accepting. And so the poor old lady is dead now,' he concluded, thrusting his letter into his pocket, 'and I suppose all that is at an end.'

'No,' replied Gronow, 'there is a charge on the estate of a hundred and fifty pounds a year to you as long as you live. Miss Lanyon's ideas of reparation are on a rather magnificent scale,' he concluded, with a spice of sarcasm.

'Aren't they?' returned Lester, unabashed. 'She must have been hard up for someone to leave her money to. May I ask what is the amount?'

'Thirty thousand pounds.'

Lester whistled.

'And who are trustees for this lucky girl?' he inquired.

'The lawyers themselves, Mr. Abdy and Mr. Perry,' replied Gronow; 'a very sensible arrangement.'

'Very,' agreed Lester. 'Well, Nora, my child, I congratulate you with all my heart.'

His tone was sincere, and he kissed her affectionately.

'I almost wish Mr. Dupleix would turn up, and take fifteen thousand pounds. What *can* I do with so much money?' sighed Nora.

At this juncture the smaller Gronow, whose existence everyone had completely ignored for the last half-hour, began to think it was time that someone took notice of him, and lifted up his voice accordingly. Alice hereupon picked him up and carried him away, Nora following her, while Gronow and Mr. Lester fell into conversation about the signs of the times and the delinquencies of the Government.

Mr. Lester stayed all the evening with them, but they spoke no more of Miss Lanyon or her money.

After he was gone, and Nora had announced her intention of going to bed, Gronow, as she wished him good-night, laid his hands on her shoulders and said :

' Nora, I want you to promise me something.'

' Yes, Gronow ! '

' I mean a serious promise, one to remember and keep always.'

' Yes, Gronow,' repeated Nora, impressed by his grave manner.

' I want you to promise,' continued Gronow, looking steadily into her eyes, ' that you will never give or lend your father any money without first asking me.'

Nora coloured deeply, but she did not look angry, only sad.

' But if it were only a few shillings ? ' she asked.

' Not even a few shillings, not even a few pence,' Gronow replied firmly, ' a few shillings often given soon runs to a few pounds ; and he has a living. I ask you to promise for his sake as well as for your own.'

' I promise, Gronow.'

And many a time afterwards was Nora grateful for the forethought that had exacted that promise.

## CHAPTER XV

'What different lots our stars accord !  
 This babe to be hailed and wooed as a Lord.  
 And that to be shunned like a leper !  
 One, to the world's wine, honey, and corn ;  
 Another, like Colchester native, born  
 To its vinegar, only, and pepper.'

'It is really a serious matter that Nora should have all this money,' said Alice.

'No doubt about it,' assented Gronow.

Miss Lanyon's bequest had certainly not produced much exhilaration of spirits as yet. Nora was too happy and contented in her simple out-of-door life to care about the luxuries and advantages which wealth could bestow; to be rich had never been a dream of hers. On the other hand, she was too much of a child to realise the responsibilities of a large fortune; yet she had an uneasy sense of a burden suddenly laid upon her. She would have liked to hand it all over to Gronow, but he explained to her that the trustees would not allow that, even if he would take it, which, of course, he would not. To himself and to Alice the money was a real source of anxiety. The trustees, of course, would invest and look after the capital, but they would not superintend the spending of the income. That responsibility would devolve upon Gronow and Alice, because they had always made themselves responsible for Nora. Her father, of course, was out of the question altogether; he could have helped her to spend the money, no doubt; indeed, a more effectual way of getting rid of it could hardly be devised.

The husband and wife had many a serious talk about the matter; the acquisition of a fortune troubled them far more than the loss of one would have done. They felt that Nora, as she grew older, ought to be in a different position, to live in a different style, to move in different society from them-

selves ; yet they were her natural guardians, and she was such a child. It was not at all likely that at twenty-one Nora would be capable of managing herself and her property.

'She wants more than four years of her majority yet,' observed Gronow ; 'in that time we may be able to work out some plan for her future.'

'There will be another difficulty, I am afraid,' sighed Alice. 'When once this is known Nora will have plenty of fortune-hunters after her.'

'Yes, and she will never know whether the man she prefers is a fortune-hunter or not,' added Gronow.

'No, poor child. Gronow, don't you think it would be well to keep this matter quiet for the present ? There seems no need to tell everyone about it. And Nora must continue to live with us for the present. What else can she do ?'

'I certainly think it much better to say nothing about it,' replied Gronow. 'Nora herself is not in the least anxious to spread the news. We may depend upon her to hold her tongue.'

'But I suppose Mr. Lester will tell it everywhere.'

'Not if he understands clearly that he is not going to benefit by it. Of course, if he is allowed to think that he can dip his hand into Nora's pocket whenever he likes, he will talk recklessly about his mine of wealth to everyone. But he is too clever to think that; he knows well enough that I shall not allow it. Besides, I mean to tell him so.'

'What a comfort it is to me that you will do all that sort of thing, Gronow,' said Alice, smiling and laying a caressing hand on his shoulder ; 'it used always to make me quite ill when I knew I had to coerce Mr. Lester.'

Gronow drew her hand to his lips.

'I have won the privilege of sheltering you from disagreeables of that sort,' he said, 'and it is right that I should use it. And I don't mind it as you do. I am of harder material.'

'And yet I know many men,' said Alice, 'who always shirk a disagreeable duty of that kind on to a woman if they possibly can.'

'Yes,' returned Gronow, 'and always pretend that it is because they dislike hurting other people's feelings, whereas all the time they are afraid of hurting their own.'

There was one conclusion at which both Gronow and Alice arrived unanimously, and that was, that now Nora should have the finishing touch to her education which had hitherto been wanting. She should go for two or three years to the best school that could be found in South Africa. Indeed, Gronow was very much inclined to send her home to school in England; but Nora, who was averse to the idea of school altogether, pleaded so vehemently against being sent to England alone, even shedding tears about it, which she very seldom did about anything, that her brother and sister yielded to her so far.

'Why do I want more schooling?' demanded Nora. 'I am sure I have had plenty. And I am nearly seventeen.'

'That is a great age, truly,' laughed Alice. 'Dear Nora, we have to go to school all our lives, so you need not think that a hardship. And then, you must also consider that now you have all this wealth you will some day have to occupy a responsible position.'

'But I don't want to occupy a responsible position,' cried Nora, 'I want to live always just as I do now with you. Why should I have a position forced upon me by an old lady whom I never saw?'

'I expect she thought she was doing you a great kindness,' remarked Gronow; 'most girls would think themselves uncommonly lucky in your place.'

'I wish they were in my place then,' grumbled Nora, but she had to give in about going to school.

'Certainly, if Miss Lanyon had left her a moderate sum, about five thousand pounds, it would have been much nicer,' Alice observed afterwards.

'That would have been a real blessing,' said Gronow, 'enough to secure her an independence, and to relieve us of any anxiety about her future.'

After further discussion they decided to send Nora to school in the colony. Gronow foresaw troublous times in Johannesburg, and he wished Nora to be safely settled

where she would be out of harm's way in case of a disturbance. A large and well-known school not far from Cape-town was their final choice, and it was arranged that she should travel down with some friends who were going to the Cape after Christmas. This gave her two or three months' respite, as she could not take the journey alone, and Gronow could not spare the time to go with her.

Shortly after these events Mr. Lester walked in upon them one evening, and announced that he was leaving Johannesburg.

'There is a young fellow named Mayer,' he said, 'whose uncle has a farm somewhere just the other side of the Orange river—a farm and a store. This uncle is old, or ill, or something, and he wants his nephew to go and live there, and look after the store and help him. Young Mayer is doing well up here, and doesn't want to go. He wrote to ask his uncle if anyone else would not do as well—and to make a long story short, I am going.'

'Won't you find the life very dull?' asked Alice.

'It is quite possible. I have led it before, and I know what it is. But I am not so young as I was, and I feel to want a quiet life sometimes. I can but try.'

Alice said nothing to dissuade him, for she felt that it would be a relief to have him out of Johannesburg.

He quite approved of their plan for Nora.

'You must make good use of your time, my child,' he said to her. 'You do not take after your father, for when I was your age I always had my nose in a book, and I could speak four languages then.'

'Well, I can speak three,' replied Nora, 'English, Dutch, and Kaffir.'

'Ah, but I meant four besides my own,' said Lester, smiling; 'and besides, you have not a real mastery of either Dutch or Kaffir. Could you write a Kaffir letter, for instance?'

'No, indeed, I haven't a notion how the words are spelt,' laughed Nora.

'You can just repeat them by the sound, like a parrot,' returned her father; 'that is not knowing a language. Ah,

well, I ought to have educated you myself ; but I neglected it, like most of the other things I ought to have done.'

There was a great deal of correspondence between Nora and her trustees, and Gronow had to write to them and explain the position in which she was, and the unsuitability of her father to look after her or her money. If he had expected Mr. Lester to give him any trouble he was agreeably disappointed. Mr. Lester apparently never gave a thought to Nora's fortune or the management of it. As far as he was concerned, matters took their own course, and people went their own way, to the devil or elsewhere, without infecting him with any disagreeable sense of responsibility.

The final arrangement during Nora's minority was, that the trustees invested and banked all her money for her, sending her a handsome yearly allowance, and requesting her to write to them at any time should she require more money for any special purpose.

The night before he left Johannesburg Mr. Lester came in to say good-bye. No one made any pretence of great grief, but they parted cordially and good friends ; a circumstance which was in great measure due to the firm attitude Gronow had always maintained towards Lester. The man who had lost his self-respect felt, though he would not have owned it, a real fear and regard for the man who had retained his ; and this in spite of the difference of age between them.

As he and Gronow were standing together at the door Lester observed carelessly :

' If you have spent anything on Nora out of your own pocket, Neilson, you should have it repaid to you out of the estate. It would be only just.'

' If I have spent anything on Nora,' replied Gronow, ' it has been a gift, and I have never missed it.'

They saw no more of Lester for a long time after that ; but he wrote to them from time to time, most entertaining letters, describing the somewhat quaint household in which he had alighted. He seemed contented, and was out of mischief ; and Alice, who always retained a certain regard for him, was sincerely glad of it.

The parting with Nora was a very different matter. Seldom have two sisters been more attached to each other than these two half-sisters, and Gronow too looked upon Nora quite as his own sister. However, he promised her that, all being well, she should come home for the June holidays; at Easter the time was too short to make it worth while to travel so far.

A lady and gentleman whom they knew well were going to the Cape, and willingly undertook to escort Nora. The train started in the evening, and Gronow and Alice both went to see her off.

'Nora, you will work and try to get on, won't you?' said Alice at parting.

'Yes, of course I will, Alice, to please you and Gronow.'

'Only six months, Nora, and if I can manage it I will come and fetch you myself,' were Gronow's parting words. It was a wearisome journey, night and day, and through hundreds of miles of dreary, treeless scenery. Nora had never travelled so far since their first arrival in the country, and her memory of that journey, more than seven years ago, was very indistinct. Her two companions were elderly people, who slept a good deal on the way. Her eyes grew tired of reading, and by the middle of the second day she was heartily wishing the journey at an end. It was late on the second evening that the train stopped for about half an hour at a good sized station, the name of which Nora had not noticed. Both her fellow travellers were asleep, but she was wide awake herself, and, feeling very thirsty, she got out to see if she could obtain some tea or coffee. There were a good many people in the station, which was not very well lighted, and she had some little difficulty in finding the refreshment room. In the half darkness and confusion she did not observe that part of the train, including her compartment, was shunted, so that when, having drunk her coffee, she returned to the platform, she could not find her carriage. Nora was very independent, but she was not accustomed to travel alone, and she began to get nervous.

'Oh dear! What can have become of it?' she exclaimed aloud.

'Have you lost your carriage?' said a voice beside her, and turning she saw a young man with a remarkably handsome face and remarkably shabby clothes, who raised his hat as he spoke to her.

'Yes, it must have moved. It is the Capetown carriage,' replied Nora.

'It has shunted: I can show you where it is,' said the young man, turning and walking along the platform.

Nora walked beside him.

'I am not travelling alone,' she remarked suddenly, with a most unusual fear of seeming improper or unladylike; 'my companions were both asleep, and I got out for some coffee.'

'The stations are confusing at night,' replied the young man briefly, but he did not seem inclined to enter into conversation, and Nora did not break the silence again. Presently they found the Capetown train and Nora's first-class compartment.

'I am very much obliged to you,' she said earnestly to her guide. He looked so hollow-cheeked, and so ragged, that she would have liked to offer him a shilling, but something held her back. In reply to her thanks he said courteously that he was glad to have been of any assistance, bowed with perfect grace, raised his shabby hat again, and walked quickly away.

'Now I am certain that man is a gentleman,' said Nora to herself, as she thankfully regained her seat; 'he looked, and spoke, and behaved like a gentleman; and yet he is ragged and half starved. I wonder who he is, and what can have brought him down like that?'

Nora had had plenty of opportunities in Johannesburg of observing broken-down gentlemen, but none of them, that she could remember, had looked like this one, with his fresh unlined face, thin indeed, but free from signs of drink or dissipation. He seemed tired, too, and sad, and yet he had such good manners, and such a refined voice. Perhaps because she had little else to think of, Nora thought about him a good deal that night.

How much more, and how differently she would have

thought, had she been able to divine that she had involuntarily ousted that young man from a rich inheritance ! For, as the reader will have guessed, Nora's unknown friend was no other than Noel, whose recent history must be reserved for another chapter.

If Fate were indeed a mighty goddess, of a very ironical turn of mind, what a malignant joy she must have had in witnessing the first meeting of these two : Noel, brought up as Miss Lanyon's own son, pampered with every luxury, now a wanderer and an outcast, 'ragged and half starved,' as Nora had observed. While Nora, who until three or four months back had been unaware of Miss Lanyon's existence, was travelling first class, in good clothes, with plenty of luggage, and the actual possessor of all Miss Lanyon's fortune.

Here is a grand opportunity for the reflections of the cynic. Class distinctions, forsooth ! They are nothing to the distinctions created by money ; wanting which, the struggling majority of mankind, like some little-known species of insects, remain unclassified.

## CHAPTER XVI

'It is not pleasant to toil sixteen hours a day; it is not good to starve overmuch; it is not well to feel bitter for long months. And yet it is well, and good, and pleasant, in the end, to learn realities and live without lies.'

'A life of this kind does not make men good in the common sense of the word, but it makes a man good for something.'

NOEL had been only a few months in the colony, but in that time he had touched the lowest depths, or so it seemed to him. His troubles began as soon as he landed. In the first place, he was by no means in his usual health. The sudden and crushing blow of disinheritance, the weeks of anxiety and exertion in London on insufficient food, the discomforts of the voyage, during which he again often went hungry because of the, to him, unappetising nature of the meals; all this had run him down more than he was aware, and, added to the complete change of climate, produced various unpleasant effects.

The sensation which most oppressed him after landing in Capetown was an irresistible and unaccountable drowsiness. He slept all night, yet he was only half awake all day. Even walking along the streets he would feel his eyelids dropping, and would sometimes almost stagger as he walked. This feeling passed off after a few days, leaving behind it an apathetic weariness very hard to combat. Combat, however, he must, for his little stock of money was vanishing very fast, while he was still living in idleness.

Mayer, who stayed a few days in Capetown before travelling up country, had recommended to Noel a cheap and respectable boarding-house—cheap, that is, in view of ordinary Capetown prices. The mode of living was one which Noel would have supposed quite impossible a few weeks back, but which was luxury compared to the third-class steamer accommodation. He had to share a bedroom

with another young fellow, who was working in a large store in Adderley Street; and it was through this young man, who was vulgar but kind-hearted, that Noel eventually obtained a situation in the same store.

Certainly, Noel had never realised until now the meaning of the words wretchedness and misery. To stand all day long in the close atmosphere of a shop; to run up and down ladders and lift bales of drapery; to sort out ribbons and laces and make up baskets of remnants; to be ordered about and found fault with by men who a short while back would have been simply obsequious to him; and then, after fourteen hours of this, to return to the second-rate atmosphere of the boarding-house, the society of giggling shop-girls and *h*-less young men, the barely-furnished bedroom, where he could never be sure of being free from the presence of his fellow-shopman: all this to a lad of Noel's bringing-up made existence simply intolerable. There was no brightness in the future to look forward to, no hope of release from the hateful daily round; for his little stock of money was exhausted, and he was only just earning enough to keep body and soul together.

It was no wonder that Noel's health began to give way. The confined life, the hasty, uncomfortable meals for which he had no appetite, above all, the want of hope, of interest, the lack of congenial companions, all combined to wear him away. On Sundays, when he was free, and on the early closing days, he used to start out for long walks in the suburbs, or up the slopes of Table Mountain. Here, for a little while, the beauty and novelty of the scenery and the vegetation helped him to forget his troubles; but when the hot weather set in he found these walks a great weariness to him, so much so that he could no longer enjoy them.

It had never occurred to Noel that the climate of South Africa might not suit him, and when the fear overtook him that this was really the case his despondency reached its climax. He had burned his boats, for he could not possibly return to England, unless he could manage to work his way back; and now, how earnestly he wished that he had never left it! The majestic outlines of the mountains, the

dazzling sea, the luxuriant green of the country, lost all beauty in his eyes: he regarded them with a jaundiced mind, for he associated them only with repugnant toil and hopeless misery.

One Sunday afternoon, at the beginning of December, he had wandered out along the shore towards Sea Point, feeling sick and tired, and yet walking on and on almost mechanically. He was seriously reflecting over his position, which was fast becoming impossible. The previous morning the foreman of his department had sent for him, and speaking kindly, but very plainly, had told him that unless he became quicker and more expert in his work his services would be of no use to them.

'And it will be quite as unsatisfactory for you as for us, Mr. Johnson,' he concluded. 'Naturally, you do not want to remain always in your present position, and yet we could not advance you without your showing more proficiency in your work.'

'I am afraid my capacities are not suited for this kind of work,' was all that Noel could reply.

'Nor your health either,' said the foreman, who really felt sorry for the young fellow and would have liked to help him. 'Why don't you try and get up country, Mr. Johnson? Some employment on a farm, or in the police, might suit you better.'

It ended, of course, in Noel giving a month's notice, and now he had to consider what he should do next. He thought of Mayer, who had offered him employment, and to whom he had written once when he first entered the store. He still had the address of his farm, Limoen Kop, near Colesberg. But how was he to get there? It was a long railway journey, and the fare was beyond Noel's means, for he had literally only a few shillings, and was badly in want of clothes.

Lost in these gloomy reflections he wandered on, scarcely noticing where he was, until he found himself amongst the rocks, which the receding tide was leaving exposed to the glittering sunshine. In spite of his preoccupation, he could not help bending down to admire the marvellous crystalline

blue of the deep quiet pools, in which the sea-anemones, joyfully expanding, had the appearance of an amalgam of precious stones in a vast setting of sapphire. Noel did not observe a man, with a bundle alongside of him, sitting on a rock close by until presently this individual wished him 'Good-day,' when he looked up somewhat startled and returned the greeting.

The man was decidedly unkempt ; his skin was tanned to a beautiful mahogany, his hair wanted cutting, his clothes were worn and patched, but he had a pleasant, good-humoured face.

Noel was tired, and glad to seat himself ; and the tramp, for such he apparently was, entered into conversation with him.

'I suppose you don't know of any work waiting for a man to do it ?' asked the man.

'Work !' replied Noel, 'that is just what I want myself.'

'Well now, that is hard lines,' said the man in a cheerful voice. 'Here have I tramped all the way from Kimberley, looking for work along the road, and now I have got to Capetown at last I was hoping for better luck.'

'You have walked from Kimberley ?' exclaimed Noel.

'Every step of the way.'

'How far is it ?'

'Six hundred miles and more.'

'And how long did it take you ?'

'Ah, well, I've been more than two months on the road ; but then I took a job of work here and there, where I could get one, just to pay my way, you know.'

'If this man can walk from Kimberley,' Noel thought to himself, 'why should not I walk to Colesberg ? It is not so far.'

He put some more questions to his companion, whom he found to be an intelligent fellow of the working class, an Irishman, moreover, with an inexhaustible fund of good humour, endurance, and fun. Hardships and privations he spoke of as lightly as if he had never known them ; whereas it was self-evident that he must have encountered many.

Noel was somewhat fascinated by his account of the free, gipsy-like life he had led on his long tramp down the country. Anything, he thought, would be better than his present life, and he would at least have his liberty. When at last he rose and wished the man good evening his mind was quite made up.

He worked out the rest of his time at the store in a state of impatient disgust, looking forward quite eagerly to the moment when he should shake off the dust of Capetown from his feet. He had arranged to leave at Christmas, when the store closed for two or three days, and on Christmas Eve he sallied forth from its doors for the last time with a feeling of relief so intense as to exclude for the moment all doubt about the future.

It was nearly midnight, for the stores had remained open till eleven o'clock that night. Nevertheless, Noel, though very tired, was determined to start early in the morning, as the weather was now oppressively hot. He intended to walk as much as possible in the early mornings, late evenings, and at night, and to rest in the middle of the day.

He had received his salary, but there was not much left by the time he had put aside what he owed at the boarding-house, and for one or two necessary articles of clothing. He made up a little bundle containing a shirt, a pair of socks, an extra pair of boots, a comb, and a few handkerchiefs. This, and a stout walking-stick, were all that he took with him. His other possessions he had packed into his portmanteau, and had arranged with his landlady to leave it there until he should send for it, when she promised to forward it to him. He lay down for a couple of hours, but scarcely slept, and before dawn he was up again, preparing to start.

He counted his money, which amounted to thirteen shillings and a few odd pence, slung his bundle over his shoulder, grasped his stick, let himself quietly out of the still sleeping house, and was fairly launched on his tramp of five hundred miles.

The delicious air of dawn was like wine to Noel. He was free. Only free to starve, perhaps, but a time does come

occasionally when a man values even that freedom. And if he could once get to Mayer's farm he was certain that the man would give him a home for a time and hold out a helping hand to him. If he could get there ! Five hundred miles on thirteen shillings ; and Noel had wit enough to know that he was not in the least likely to get any jobs of work on the way as his friend the tramp had done.

The beginning of the walk was auspicious enough. The road was good, there was plenty of shade, the air was fresh and sweet, and the villages were not far apart, so that there was always a chance of buying food, or asking the way. Noel, however, had not omitted to provide himself with a map of the road ; and there was always the railway by which he could guide himself if he did get astray. As he got further into the country he began to realise, and to appreciate, the meaning of colonial hospitality. He had scarcely picked up any Dutch as yet, but now he began to try and acquire it, so as to converse with the people he came across on the road. Noel was very sociable by nature, and did not like to be long alone ; he began to find that not only does poverty make strange bed-fellows, but that it disposes us to make friends of some whom in the days of our ease we look down upon.

It was on the third day that he called at a Dutch farm to ask the road, being somewhat doubtful between two. The family were just sitting down to breakfast, and Noel began to apologise for his intrusion ; but, to his surprise, he was immediately invited to sit down and share the meal with as much cordiality as if he were an old friend.

These people all spoke English, and were very English in their ways, except in the complete absence of all stiffness and formality. They asked Noel where he was going, but he thought he should make a bad impression if he said he was walking to Colesberg for want of money to get there in any other way ; so he mentioned a place about ten miles further on, which he knew to be on the road.

' You will find it very hot walking now,' the farmer said to him.

' Oh, I am in no hurry,' replied Noel carelessly ; ' if I get

there this evening it will do. I shall rest in the middle of the day.'

'It is past nine now, and the sun is very hot,' continued the farmer, 'if you like to stay here until it gets cooler, you will be very welcome.'

Noel was touched by this spontaneous kindness, and after a little hesitation accepted the offer. He had been walking a great part of the night, and was very tired, but in this hospitable house he had both sleep and refreshment.

Later in the day the farmer spanned in his cart, in which he was going out on some business of his own, and offering Noel a seat, set him three or four miles on his way. Noel made a note of the name of this man—it was Van der Merwe—and retained a grateful memory of him.

His experiences were not all so fortunate, however. He was not accustomed to so much continuous walking, and his feet got sore and blistered. Moreover, his boots began to wear out with alarming rapidity, and he wanted to make them last for half the distance, if possible, as he had only one other pair, which was not new.

One night he tried walking barefoot, but his feet were already tender, and he could not stand it; he struggled on for some time, but when, finally, he nearly trod upon a snake, which turned upon him, and gave him some trouble to kill it, he decided that walking barefoot was a failure for one who was not to the manner born.

Another time a heavy thunderstorm caught him, and he was wet to the skin. He had to walk himself dry, for he had no other suit of clothes.

His attempts to wash his own shirt were not crowned with success. It did not look cleaner afterwards; being a flannel shirt, it shrunk amazingly; and when he put it on, rough-dried, it marked his whole body with irritating corrugations. His pocket-handkerchiefs were no better; they looked yellow, and felt scrubby. To a young man of fashion, who had always been particular about his linen, this was not an insignificant trial. One evening he overtook a wagon which did not seem to have a heavy load on. He asked the owner to give him a lift, and the man just nodded in

reply. Noel accordingly squeezed himself between two bales of wool and there fell fast asleep, in spite of the jolting of the wagon, and the heartrending yells of the driver. When he awoke, the wagon had stopped and the oxen were spanned out ; the coloured boys had made a fire and were boiling coffee. Noel clambered down and thanked the owner for his ride. The man, who was a half-caste, seemed silent and surly ; nevertheless, he refused the money which Noel offered him out of his slender store, and invited him to have a cup of coffee before he went on.

There is no better way of becoming acquainted with a country, its inhabitants, and their manners, than to tramp through it on foot, as Noel was doing now. He might have lived years in Capetown without learning as much.

After about a fortnight of this life he found that, in spite of all drawbacks, his health was greatly improved.

He was living, eating, and sleeping, continually out-of-doors, in what is admitted to be one of the finest climates in the world. His appetite, indeed, was generally quite disproportioned to the food he was able to procure. The habit of walking grew upon him, his powers increased, and he did his twenty miles a day without distress. His feet, which he lavishly bathed in cold water whenever he came to any, healed and hardened, and thereafter gave him no more trouble. He was very thin, certainly, and very brown, and his clothes began to look suspiciously shabby, but when he recalled the dreary months in Adderley Street they seemed a nightmare compared to this.

His way was by no means so agreeable now as it had been at first. He had reached the great Karoo, that vast central plain of sand, scrub, and stony kopjes, which looks so entirely uninviting to any form of life, that one wonders, travelling through it day after day, what induced anyone ever to settle there. Noel grew unconscionably weary of the long, long, endless roads, which he could see winding before him for miles, the unvarying monotony of the sage-green scrub and the quaint flat-topped kopjes, where the only living creatures seemed to be snakes and lizards, and a few depressed-looking Boer goats.

The homesteads were sparsely scattered, and he often went for many miles without seeing one.

When he did come to one he was always offered a share of whatever the inhabitants had themselves.

Indeed, his little store of money would never have lasted him had it not been for the hospitality that was invariably extended to him, and for which the money he offered was as invariably refused.

It was while traversing this desolate land that he had one night a novel and amusing experience.

It was just sundown when he reached a good-sized Dutch farmhouse, and stopped to ask for a drink of water. A tall and muscular Dutch *vrouw*, who was standing at the door, invited him in, and asked him to sit down with them to supper, which was just being put on the table. It was not a very tempting supper, consisting chiefly of tasteless mutton and coffee; but Noel had developed a wonderful capacity during the last few weeks for eating whatever was put before him.

He observed the family into which he was thus suddenly introduced with some curiosity. The farmer himself was rather a fine-looking man, with a great deal of hair. There was a married son with his wife and two children, who apparently lived in the house, and another son, a lad about Noel's own age, who never once opened his lips the whole evening. There was also a woman, whose relationship to the others Noel could not decide, and whose age he could not guess. She was lame, and smiled so perpetually and so vaguely, that he finally concluded she was not quite right in her head.

The conversation at supper turned chiefly on bad times, scarcity, and ailments, of which the whole family seemed to have a liberal supply—rheumatism, influenza, and what not. Noel wondered why people should be so unhealthy who lived amid such healthy surroundings and led such simple lives.

Supper was nearly ended when the outer door opened and three or four young men walked in. They exchanged greetings with the family, shook hands with Noel, who

did not know them from Adam, and sat down at the table.

There was not much food left by this time, but they seemed quite satisfied. Noel could not make out whether they lived in the house or not, but decided they must be near neighbours, belated on their way home. Yet a general family likeness seemed to pervade the whole party. After supper all the men went outside to smoke. Noel did not smoke, but he was glad to get out into the fresh air. He intended to go on his way, but the good people pressed him to stay the night. Noel would not have done so, however, had it not seemed as if a storm were coming up, so he remained.

When they went inside again the women-folk had all disappeared, and the floor of the living-room was strewn with beds, laid down here, there, and everywhere. The farmer pointed out one to Noel, which was laid across the door leading to the inner rooms. He took possession of it, not with very agreeable anticipations of the night's rest; and, in fact, the closeness of the atmosphere and the many-keyed snores of the sleepers prevented him from sleeping much himself. Towards morning he fell into a doze, from which he was aroused, before it was light, by someone stepping over him. To his astonishment it was the farmer's *vrouw*, who had apparently just issued from her bedroom, dressed exactly as she had been on the previous evening. Having traversed Noel, she was next obliged to surmount her son, which required a higher and more lengthy stride. There was yet another sleeper between herself and her goal, which was the fireplace, and having overcome this obstacle, she set about lighting the fire and boiling the water for early coffee. The comical side of this performance suddenly struck Noel so forcibly that he lay in his bed shaking with silent laughter. None of the other sleepers were in the least disturbed.

Presently, however, when the fire blazed up and the cups and saucers began to rattle, they awoke one by one, yawned, stretched, and sat up. Noel, who was wearying to escape, threaded his way among them and went outside. The

morning air was heavenly, and he stood and filled his lungs with deep draughts of it.

When the old *vrouw* brought him some coffee, Noel offered, as usual, to pay for his accommodation, but she refused, as usual, to accept any payment, and seemed quite hurt that he should have thought of it ; wherefore he thanked her cordially, drank his coffee, and went his way.

## CHAPTER XVII

‘As a miner delves  
For hidden treasure bedded deep in stone,  
So seek ye and find the treasure patriotism  
In lands remote and dipped with alien chrism,  
And make those new lands heart-dear and your own.’

THE last week of Noel’s walk was more trying than all the rest had been. The heat grew more intense, and the roads longer and more shadeless with every mile. He could not sleep away all the sunny hours, for he would have lost too much time that way ; and his money was very nearly done, while his clothes were falling into holes. He began to think he would not have the face to present himself to Mayer in such a condition. There were probably ladies belonging to the household ; Mayer no doubt had a wife and daughters ; he could not expect them to take him in, looking like the veriest disreputable tramp that ever passed his life on the road. He realised now that he had not quite counted the cost when he so lightly undertook a five-hundred-mile walk ; it had certainly done him good in some ways ; but it had done his clothes a great deal more harm than he had reckoned on ; and, moreover, he had not been able to shave.

Noel was not in love with his adopted country so far ; Capetown had become hateful to him through association ; the Karoo appeared to him a vast weariness. Day after day the same interminable waste of sage-green scrub, stones, and sand ; the same quaint, unnatural-looking hills, with caps of stone that seemed as if they had been fitted on by some giant hand ; the same quivering, breathless air, varied sometimes by tearing hot winds, like a blast from the mouth of a furnace, which whirled the sand aloft in revolving columns, or swept it along in dense clouds, filling Noel’s eyes, ears, and mouth with fine grit.

At night there was some compensation. The starlit darkness was soothing to his aching eyes, the road did not seem so long when he could only see it for a few yards in front of him ; the vast, empty stretches of earth and sky were solemn and peaceful, and seemed to carry his thoughts above and beyond himself and his narrow circle of cares. If night is the cover for many evil deeds, it is also the source of many high thoughts.

Sometimes he came across a little river, winding on its solitary way through hundreds of miles of wilderness to the sea. As a rule, it was but a dry bed of stones ; but here and there would be refreshing pools left by the last flood, and all the way its course would be marked by a narrow belt of thorn bushes, very scratchy and obtrusive, and terribly shrill with cicadas, but still affording a grateful shade.

Noel had never been so close to Nature, so intimate with her before. He was town-bred, and many a time in the oppressive solitude of that infinite veldt a keen longing seized him for the bright, busy, artificial life to which he was accustomed ; for the conveniences and luxuries always ready to his hand ; for gaslights and gaiety, the foolish merry jargon of his social set, the freedom of irresponsibility, which was so different from his present freedom—to starve ; yes, even for the servants and the tradespeople, those useful intermediates who form an impermeable stratum of padding between the wealthy and the sordid toil which provides their physical necessities.

So that Noel was not greatly in love with Nature just at present ; he would have liked her better, perhaps, under a gentler aspect ; less fierce in her brilliancy, less hard in her outlines, a little less sublime in that endless expanse of horizon which made one poor, solitary, toiling mortal feel sadly small and unimportant.

Often hungry and thirsty, often tired and dispirited, face to face with the primitive conditions of life and its elemental struggles, he plodded on, day after day, or night after night. The five hundred miles might have been five thousand.

‘ What a waste of room here ! ’ he sometimes thought as he strained his eyes for a boundary, a contraction, a finality

which never came, ‘when one thinks of the crowd on one acre of London !’

Thus it dawned upon him slowly that in this way all men had lived once, toiling painfully for daily bread, not always with success ; groping their way hardly upwards towards those days of enlightenment which, by their efforts, should shine upon their descendants. And in all new countries it must be the same ; men must begin again from the beginning, face to face with Nature, contending with her forces, obeying her laws, and thus learning to turn them to account for their own advancement. I wonder if a remote posterity will owe as much to us as we owe to those long ago forefathers of ours !

At last Noel found, upon inquiry, that he was within a few miles of Colesberg. He learnt this at a farm where he stayed for an hour or two to rest and refresh. The farmer’s wife took his coat, and brushed and mended it for him, a service for which Noel was intensely grateful to her. He was wearing clothes now which a year ago he would have been ashamed to offer to his valet.

He left the farm again in the evening, as he wished to enter the town after dark, but went out of his way, and found himself at the railway station, which is not in the town. It was of no consequence, however. He had no money to stay in the town ; all he wanted was to find out where Mayer’s farm was, and that he could very likely learn just as well at the station. He went in accordingly, and squeezing a sixpence out of his sadly empty pocket, he procured a cup of coffee. While he was drinking it a train came in from up-country, and a bustle arose on the platform.

Noel was seized with a sudden desire to mix in a crowd once more. He finished his coffee and went out on to the platform, where, as it was not well lighted, he was not afraid of his clothes being noticed.

He observed that the front part of the train, with a board labelled ‘Capetown’ on the carriages, was shunted to another platform, and was just reflecting how much longer it had taken him to get from Capetown to Colesberg than it

would take the train to get from Colesberg to Capetown, when he perceived a tall young lady, with a fluff of fair hair and a rather anxious face, walking along the platform, evidently looking for her carriage.

Noel at once guessed what she wanted, and, as we know, he offered to show her where it was. It was a strange sensation to him to be walking along by the side of a well-dressed young lady whom a few months ago he would have addressed on equal terms, but with whom now he felt no wish to converse, having descended into an unexplored region of darned clothes and seedy hats. He glanced round at her once or twice, and was pleased with the fresh, girlish face, the frank blue eyes, and the fair halo of hair. Noel was not tall, and Nora's eyes were nearly on a level with his ; he took care not to meet them, however, and as soon as he had seen her safely to her carriage, he raised his hat and walked away without looking round again.

This little incident, trivial as it seemed, upset and disturbed him, almost as much as if he had known who Nora was. He had seen many prettier and more distinguished-looking girls, yet this one haunted him simply by reason of the distance between them. Since leaving England he had not met any ladies, to associate with them ; and the feeling that there was such a gap created by fortune between himself and an ordinary ladylike girl more than hurt him—it tormented him.

He thought he could walk off this uneasy feeling, and went back to the ticket-office to inquire the road to Mayer's farm. After some time he found a boy who gave him rather vague directions ; and upon this he started, having resolved that if he arrived there during the night he would find some corner in which to sleep, and show himself at the house as soon as he saw that anyone was about.

He walked on for a long way, not feeling at all sure that he was on the right road, and dreading the moment when he must present himself, shabby and unshaven, before Mr. Mayer and an unknown family.

It was a bright moonlight night, warm and still. Noel was quite out in the veldt again, tramping steadily along,

when, somewhere about midnight, he stopped short to listen to a sound.

It was a most extraordinary sound to hear in the wilds of the veldt at midnight. It was not an animal, nor a bird, nor a snake, nor the wind. It was a sound that suddenly carried Noel back to the nights in the tropics at sea, the starlit deck, the swing of the vessel, and the rhythmic beat of the engines.

Yet what sort of an engine could there be out here? Had he wandered out of his way and stumbled upon the railway again? Impossible, there was no sign of the railway; and this sound was not like a locomotive, neither did it move along; it stopped in one place.

Then it occurred to Noel that it was a noise more like pumping, yet not like any pump he had heard before; there was a jarring vibration, as if the mysterious machine encountered some resistance.

Finally, in spite of a somewhat eerie sensation, he started forward in the direction of the sound to discover what it really was, and presently he perceived in the moonlight two or three dark figures, apparently Kaffirs. Approaching, he saw what partly explained the matter, yet still puzzled him. There was a shallow pit scooped out in the ground, in the centre of which was a machine of some description, quite new to Noel. Three or four coloured boys were working this machine, while a white man with a lantern superintended them.

When Noel came up to them, the men stopped work, evidently surprised at seeing him.

'Excuse me,' said Noel to the superintendent, lifting his hat, 'I heard your machine at work, and was so immensely puzzled to know what it could be, that I came off the road to look.'

The man smiled, and returned his greeting in English, which he spoke with a foreign accent.

'We are boring for water,' he said.

'But why in the middle of the night?' asked Noel.

'Because it is so hot in the day. On these bright moon-light nights we can see quite well, and both I and my men

would rather work from eight in the evening till six in the morning than from eight in the morning till six in the evening.'

'I understand,' returned Noel, 'and I am of the same mind, as you see; I walk at night rather than in the day time.'

'It is much pleasanter,' said the engineer.

He told his men to resume work, which they did; and Noel, seating himself on the bank beside the pit, watched the working of the machine with interest, and had it explained to him.

Presently he asked the engineer:

'Is this Mr. Mayer's farm?'

'Oh no,' replied the engineer, 'this is Mr. Botha's farm. But I know Mr. Mayer's farm, I was boring there some time ago. It is thirteen miles from here.'

'Thirteen miles!' exclaimed Noel blankly; 'I must have come completely out of my way, then?'

He spoke in a dispirited tone, for he did not feel at all disposed, nor indeed able, to do another thirteen miles before sunrise; and he had hoped that he was now near his goal.

'I should advise you to stay here till to-morrow,' observed the engineer, noting his weariness. 'Mr. Botha is very kind, and he would be quite vexed if you went away without resting here.'

'Well, I think I shall have to do so,' said Noel. 'Mr. Botha is Dutch, I suppose?'

'Yes, he is Dutch. His wife is dead, and his daughter keeps house for him. His other sons and daughters are all married.'

'There is no one but himself and his daughter, then?'

'That is all, only they often have guests.'

'You are staying in the house, I suppose?'

'Yes, I have my tent, and I intended to live in it, but they pressed me to stay in the house while I was working for them.'

'Well, I don't know what they will say when they see me,' sighed Noel, 'for by daylight I am the most disreputable object. I have walked five hundred miles, and my

clothes are in rags. You had better lend me your tent, I think.'

The engineer laughed good-naturedly.

'A gentleman is a gentleman [in spite of rags,' he said.

Noel's heart warmed towards him.

' You are not English, are you ? ' he asked.

' No, I am German,' replied the engineer ; ' my name is Ahrens.'

' My name is Johnson,' said Noel.

' Why do you not rest and have a sleep now ? ' said Ahrens. ' I will wake you when I stop work, and we will go to the house together. There is the boys' tent ; there is no one there, and here is my coat you can lie upon.'

Noel thanked him heartily, but preferred lying outside to trying the Kaffirs' tent. He was quite accustomed by this time to sleep anywhere and at any time, and he soon made himself comfortable with the aid of the engineer's coat.

The rhythmic jar of the boring machine did not disturb him ; on the contrary, it had a rather soporific effect. He soon fell into a doze, in which he saw a clear vision of a tall, lithe figure, crowned with a yellow halo, from beneath which a pair of frank blue eyes looked defiantly into his.

It was only a dream of a girl whom he was not in the least likely ever to see again ; yet the dream pleased him, and he passed from it into a dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER XVIII

'I have a father, too, but he is a dead one. Alas and alack-a-day ! Poor was I born, and poor do I remain. I neither win nor lose. Thus I wag through the world, half the time on foot, and the other half walking : and always as merry as a thunderstorm in the night.'

NOEL was awakened by a touch on his shoulder. The sun was up, and Ahrens was standing over him.

'I am going to the house now,' he said, 'and I see that the people are already up.'

Noel rose somewhat reluctantly to his feet, and glanced down at his clothes.

'Never mind your clothes,' said Ahrens.

Noel did mind very much all the same. As they walked across the veldt together he perceived the homestead, which was a replica of all the other Dutch farms he had seen, only that it seemed larger and more comfortable than a good many. It was a whitewashed house, one storeyed, with a thatched roof ; a little way off were the ploughed lands and the garden, full of flourishing fruit trees ; a large dam, overhung with willow trees, held a good supply of water.

'This seems to be a nice place,' observed Noel.

'Yes, it is a very good farm,' replied the engineer, 'and Mr. Botha is a good farmer. He is more progressive than a great many of the Dutch farmers.'

'You speak English very well,' said Noel.

'I am so accustomed to speak English,' replied Ahrens, 'since I have been in Africa, that I almost forget my own language.'

'Does Mr. Botha understand English ?' asked Noel, 'because I don't speak much Dutch.'

'Oh, yes, he speaks and understands English quite well, and so does his daughter.'

They now approached the house, in front of which was a broad stoep. On the stoep sat the farmer, drinking his

morning coffee. He was a very tall, loosely-built man, with abundant brown hair just streaked with grey, and rather fine features. His curved nose and long beard gave him a somewhat patriarchal aspect, which pleased Noel, but made him more painfully conscious than ever of his shabby appearance.

'This is Mr. Johnson,' said Ahrens, introducing him; 'he has walked a long way, and last night, at midnight, he arrived by me and my machine, and had a rest there.'

Botha looked attentively at Noel while the engineer made this little speech; he rose and shook hands with him, asked him to sit down, and called out to someone inside the house to bring two more cups of coffee.

'Where do you come from?' he asked Noel in English.

'From Capetown,' replied Noel.

'But you have not walked from Capetown?'

'Yes, every step of the way.'

Botha uttered a forcible exclamation in Dutch.

'And why have you come so far?' he continued.

'I wanted to find Mr. Mayer's farm,' replied Noel; 'he was on board the same boat with me, coming out from England, and he promised to help me to some work if I should be in want of it.'

'I know Mr. Mayer,' observed Botha, 'but his farm is a long way from this. You had better stay here and rest for a few days, and then I will drive you over.'

'You are very kind,' said Noel, 'but really I am ashamed to stay with anyone in these rags.'

'We can make that right,' returned Botha; 'I keep a store here, and there are some clothes in it. They are not very good ones, but they will be tidy.'

'I have no money,' said Noel, colouring deeply.

'That does not matter. When you are rested you can do some work for me, that will do instead of money.'

'I will gladly do that,' exclaimed Noel, 'and I can work to-day. I am not tired, I am feeling quite fit.'

It was not that he was really inclined for work, but he disliked being under an obligation to this stranger.

Botha asked him many more questions about himself, partly from inquisitiveness, no doubt, but still in a kindly

manner that Noel could not resent. While they were talking, a girl came out on to the stoep and joined them.

'My daughter Hester,' said Botha, introducing them; 'Mr. Johnson, Hester.'

Noel shook hands with her with an agreeable sensation of surprise, for she was by far the prettiest Dutch maiden he had yet seen. A great mass of dark hair was coiled about her head, and was matched by a pair of soft dark eyes and eyebrows. A creamy complexion, a small *retroussé* nose, a pleasant, smiling mouth, and exquisite teeth, made up a picture very agreeable to look upon. So thought Noel, and he looked accordingly, with the frankly admiring gaze which he always bestowed on a pretty girl, and forgot for the moment his shabby clothes.

Hester, apparently, did not think of them either, being also attracted by Noel's handsome face—handsome still, in spite of the hollow cheeks and the overgrowth of hair. It was seldom, indeed, that such a gentlemanly-looking young fellow came by on the tramp. The tramps were generally most uninteresting specimens: greasy old Jews, with packs on their backs; half-castes in search of work, and fit for no employment under heaven; broken down white men, of every conceivable nationality, who had ruined themselves with drink, and lived by sponging on the hospitality of the farmers.

'But how is it, Mr. Johnson,' asked Botha, 'that you are so quite alone, and so poor, and yet so young? Have you no parents?'

'Probably not,' replied Noel; 'I was washed ashore from a wreck, when quite a little baby, and everyone else on the ship was drowned, my parents probably among them.'

Being further questioned, he told them the rest of his story. He had no object in concealing it, and their open-mouthed interest flattered him. When he came to the climax of his disinheritance both father and daughter broke into fervent expressions of sympathy, in which Ahrens also joined.

'That was very hard lines,' he said, 'but I suppose the poor old lady was out of her mind.'

'I believe she must have been,' replied Noel, and passed quickly on to the next stage of his history. He did not mention Miss Lanyon's name, merely observing that, not having the least idea what his real name might be, he had assumed the common name of Johnson on leaving England.

Hester's dark eyes actually had tears in them when he came to the end of his tale, which wound up with the five-hundred-mile walk. It never occurred to any of his listeners to doubt the truth of what he told them, his manner was too simple and straightforward.

'Let us come to the store, Mr. Johnson,' said Botha, rising, 'and see what we can find in the way of clothes.'

He led the way round the corner of the house on to another broad stoep without a verandah. The store opened on to the stoep, and Botha, taking a key from his pocket, unfastened the door and entered.

There was the usual conglomeration to be observed in all country stores, of groceries, unhealthy-looking confectionery, cheap drapery, slouch hats, mouse-traps, crockery, saddles, tools, inexpensive clocks and mantelpiece ornaments in execrable taste. A mingled odour of boots, cheese, and tin saucepans, always strongest in the morning, after the place had been shut up all night, assailed Noel's nostrils, and caused him a shudder of disgust.

'Fancy coming to buy clothes in a place like this!' thought the young dandy, who had always looked upon a ready-made suit as a mark of the beast.

With inward repugnance he made choice of a pair of dark coloured cord trousers, a rough grey jacket and waistcoat, and a dust-coloured alpaca coat for the hot days; also a couple of coloured cotton shirts, a black necktie, and a pair of *veldtschoen*. He was very particular about ascertaining the price of these things, which he was resolved to work out in some way or other.

When they returned to the house, Hester reappeared, and conducted him to a small but comfortable bedroom, which was to be his as long as he chose to stay. Being pressed to mention anything else that he wanted, he asked

for a bath and a razor. The bath was forthcoming, but the razor presented a difficulty ; Mr. Botha never shaved.

In good time, however, it occurred to Hester that Mr. Ahrens had a razor, and would no doubt be willing to lend it. Mr. Ahrens was quite willing, and Noel proceeded to transform himself into a respectable member of society.

His new clothes were too large for him, they were the acme of discomfort, and he felt a perfect ruffian in them ; but they were at least clean and whole, and to that extent superior to his own.

Be that as it may, his changed appearance when he presented himself at the breakfast-table created a marked impression on the rest of the party. The dust and stains of travel washed from his sunburnt face and hands, the dark silky moustache reduced to its proper dimensions, the indescribable air of neatness which he had contrived to impart to his ill-fitting ready-made suit, all combined to make a different man of him. Botha complimented him openly on the transformation, while Hester stole furtive glances at him every minute. Presently he encountered one of these glances, and returned it with interest ; and after that they exchanged them openly.

Botha would not hear of Noel doing any work that day, and indeed Noel was glad to rest. He felt that he had really come to his journey's end, for his host promised to drive him over to Mayer's farm any day he wished to go. Noel asked Hester what family Mr. Mayer had.

'He is not married ; he has two sisters who live with him,' she replied, 'such kind old people, and so funny !'

'How are they funny ?' asked Noel, responding to her smile.

'Oh, I won't tell you, that would spoil it ! You will find out when you go to see them.'

She did tell him some things, however, and in a very amusing way. Noel found her very pleasant to talk to ; not clever, perhaps, or highly educated, but sensible, shrewd, and always good-tempered. Moreover, she was not averse to a little flirtation, at which Noel was an adept.

Later in the day, when they were again sitting on the

stoep together, Botha suggested to Noel that he should take charge of the store for a few days.

'I had a white boy here who used to help me,' he said, 'but he has gone away, and I shall have to find someone else, as I require help. If you would look after it so long.' Noel agreed, though he had no taste for store-keeping, but he did not mind for a short time, and was anxious to repay his obligations to Botha. He was willing to begin the next morning.

'Only I don't speak Dutch very well,' he said, 'though I can understand most of what I hear.'

'You will soon learn,' replied Botha, and after that he often talked to Noel in Dutch himself.

Up to the present time Noel had heard very little about disturbances in the Transvaal, or ill-feeling between Dutch and English. His acquaintance with South African history, even in modern times, was extremely superficial. He remembered reading about the Jameson Raid, and getting considerably confused over the rights and wrongs of the case, in which respect he was no worse off than many wiser people; but since then he had a vague idea that things had settled down, and that the Jubilee had set matters right all round. While staying with the Bothas, however, he received some enlightenment. Wishing to improve his Dutch, he sometimes took up the Dutch newspapers that lay about, one of which was *Ons Land*. The things that he read there rather surprised him, when he considered that the paper was published in a British colony, and that the editor and the contributors were, presumably, British subjects. He entered into conversation with Botha on the subject one day, pointing out what seemed to him utterances of doubtful loyalty.

'All that is quite legitimate,' Botha explained to him; 'we have two parties in our Parliament just as you have in your English Parliament. There is the Bond party and the Progressives. This paper is the organ of the Afrikander Bond, an association formed to prevent the Dutch element from being trampled upon, crushed, and obliterated in this country.'

'Surely there is no danger of that?' observed Noel; 'we

have never done that to any other nationality in any of our colonies.'

'No danger?' repeated Botha quickly. 'Do you not know what has been going on in the Transvaal this last seven or eight years—in the Transvaal, which is our own country, a Dutch country?'

'But I think the Outlanders have some real grievances,' said Noel, feeling that he was getting into unknown regions; 'it is not fair that because they are aliens they should pay all the taxes.'

'It is quite fair,' returned Botha, 'that men who are making millions of money out of the mines should pay a larger share of taxes than the farmers who make a few uncertain hundreds out of agriculture.'

'But they do not get justice in the courts,' argued Noel.

'Justice!' cried Botha, smiting the bench with his hand. 'Justice for Jews and capitalists! What is the justice they want? Like that old Jew in your English play—what is his name?'

'Shylock,' hazarded Noel.

'Shylock. He wanted justice, and his bond. And what was his bond? A pound of flesh. To wring the life-blood from the poor man who had not wherewithal to pay. That is the justice your Outlanders would like to have.'

Noel tried to stand up for the English side, but he was far too ignorant of the subject to cope with Botha, who had every argument, and, it must be added, every lie, on the Boer side of the question at his fingers' ends.

Ahrens also inclined to the Dutch point of view, and, as day after day these discussions were renewed, Noel himself began to think that there was at least a preponderance of right on their side. Botha's arguments were plausible and convincing; Noel did not know which were founded on truth and which were not, and one or two English papers which he chanced to see referred to the subject in a boastful and domineering tone which disgusted him. In addition to this, he was swayed, as we all are, more or less, by personal feeling. Ever since he had landed in the country he had met

with the best type of Dutch people, and seen the best side of their character. He had invariably received from them free-handed hospitality, and a hearty kindness that asked for no return ; and now he had fallen on his feet in a friendly household, with a pretty, attractive girl in it. The want of cleanliness and refinement, which had offended him in some of the houses he had called at, was never apparent here, where everything was arranged in very English fashion ; indeed, it occurred to Noel that if English people were hated, English manners and customs were very much in vogue among the superior class of Dutch.

He made this remark to Botha, who promptly replied, ‘ Certainly, many English customs are very good, and we are glad to adopt them ; but that is no reason why our countrymen should be oppressed by English millionaires.’

‘ But here in the Colony, at all events, you suffer from no disabilities,’ remarked Noel.

‘ I cannot altogether subscribe to that,’ returned Botha ; ‘ but you have not gone into our politics sufficiently to understand these questions.’

‘ I wish to understand them, however,’ said Noel, who really began to be interested, and who had observed, moreover, that Hester was very well up in the subject, and quite able to take part in their discussions.

So that it was not long before he did understand the Dutch side of the question thoroughly, and, as before said, he inclined very much to that side himself. All his circumstances and surroundings influenced him that way, all the people he met at the house were Dutch, and of the same way of thinking ; and he really never heard any arguments from the English point of view at all. Perhaps, too, there was something in the remark Hester made to him one day, after a long political discussion that had taken place in the store between Botha and some of his customers :

‘ You know, Mr. Johnson,’ she said, ‘ I do not believe you are all English yourself. You do not look it.’

‘ Well, I have no idea what I am,’ Noel replied rather sadly ; ‘ I may be a Patagonian for aught I know, or am ever likely to know.’

Yet he had often thought, too, that he had perhaps a strain of foreign blood in him—it might be French, or Italian; and he sometimes really preferred to believe that he was not altogether an Englishman. There were some traits of English character that did not appeal to him at all.

## CHAPTER XIX

'Bring your will to your fate and suit your mind to your circumstances, and love those people heartily that it is your fortune to be engaged with.'

NOEL had been about a week at Wolve Kop, which was the name of Mr. Botha's farm, when the farmer said to him one morning :

'I have been thinking that if Mayer has nothing for you to do just now, you would perhaps like to remain with me. I want help, and not only in the store ; you can try your hand at farming, and see how you like it. What do you think ?'

Noel was already beginning to feel at home, and rather unwilling to uproot himself again. He was not likely to be any better off with the Mayers than he was here, and the work would probably be the same.

'I think I should like it,' he said, 'if I can really be of use to you. Of course I know nothing about farming, but I suppose I can learn.'

'Whatever you do, you will have to learn it,' said Botha, rather bluntly ; 'however, you would like to see Mayer before you make up your mind. We will drive over there tomorrow.'

They started early, at six o'clock, in order to avoid the heat of the day. Noel found it a pleasant change to be carried along the sandy, bare road, behind a strong pair of ponies, instead of tramping it wearily on his own feet.

Limoen Kop, Mr. Mayer's farm, justified its name by the little stony kopje which overlooked it, and the row of lemon trees which bounded the garden on one side. It was an ugly, straggling house, with a very high stoep ; and Noel observed that Mr. Mayer also kept a store.

Mayer himself came out on hearing the cart drive up, and

Noel at once recognised, with quite a friendly feeling, the tall, lank figure, and iron-grey hair. Mayer did not recognise him at first, and when he did, was very much astonished to see him.

'You here, Mr. Johnson!' he exclaimed. 'I thought you were in Capetown.'

'Well, I was in Capetown,' replied Noel smiling, 'but now I am here, as you see.'

'But why did you not let me know you were coming?'

'That is rather a long story, which I will tell you presently.'

'Well, whatever the story, I am very glad to see you again. Come in, Mr. Botha, your horses will be all right. You are just in time for breakfast.'

They went inside, and presently a coloured girl summoned them to the dining-room, where breakfast was laid, and Mr. Mayer's two sisters received them.

Noel's curiosity about these two ladies had been aroused by Hester's descriptions, and he regarded them with interest. They were not really old, probably between forty and fifty, but they were dressed in a fashion of fifty years back; or perhaps, more correctly, in a fashion of their own, for Noel never remembered to have seen anything like it. One was very tall and stout, the other very short and thin, and they were not in the least alike, nor in the least like their brother. The tall, stout one, whom Botha addressed as Miss Mayer, had a sleepy, good-tempered face, wonderfully smooth, and unwrinkled. She wore a black blouse that looked as if it were made of lining, adorned with a collar of really good lace, and a yellow muslin skirt, which reminded Noel of covers that he had seen on bird cages. The short, thin one, who was called Miss Lydia, was evidently, if the younger sister, the ruling spirit. She sat at the head of the table, arrayed in a green cashmere dress trimmed with red plush, and poured out the coffee.

What struck Noel most about them both was the curious mixture of ceremonious stiffness and childlike frankness in their manner. They shook hands with him, on being introduced, as if they thought it scarcely correct to do so, yet

five minutes afterwards, without any intention of impertinence, they were asking him questions about himself which he was obliged to evade, as he did not wish to answer them.

They were already seated at the table when another individual entered the room, with a careless apology for being late. This was a tall, striking-looking man, of about fifty years, with a weary face, and a polished but indifferent manner. He bowed to Mr. Botha, to whom he was also evidently a stranger, and to Noel, who could not repress a slight start when he heard the name of the new-comer—Lester.

Could he be a relation of the heiress? It was not in the least likely. Yet Noel thought it very strange that he should happen upon a person of that name before he had been a year in the country. Lester was not a common name; still, no doubt there would be several in South Africa.

'My brother often talked about you, Mr. Johnson,' Miss Lydia said to him.

'So you see we know you quite well already,' Miss Mayer added, with a large benevolent smile.

'Eldred very friendly with anyone he takes a fancy to,' continued Miss Lydia in a kind of aside.

Eldred was Mr. Mayer.

'How do you like South Africa, Mr. Johnson?' asked Miss Mayer presently.

Noel found this question difficult to answer.

'I can hardly tell,' he replied frankly; 'I have not been very long in the country, and I have had rather a rough time in it. I dare say I shall like it better after a while.'

He would have said at once that he detested it, had it not been for his invariable habit of trying to please his company. Noel never liked to make himself disagreeable to anyone.

'You like England best?' said Miss Mayer.

'Yes, I do, at present,' smiled Noel.

'Of course he likes England best,' Miss Lydia observed to her sister, 'very natural he should—his own country.'

Noel remarked a spasmodic quality in the conversation of these two, which was not due only to their always speaking in short sentences, but also to the fact that they left out a good many small words, as apparently unnecessary. As

Noel told Hester afterwards, they talked like telegrams, with 'is' and 'and' left out. They plied him with questions so persistently that he became quite bewildered in his efforts to follow their rapid transition from one subject to another, and to answer them coherently and politely. He saw that Mr. Lester, who sat opposite to him, was watching him with languid amusement, and he thought to himself, 'I wonder if that fellow takes a rise out of the old ladies sometimes. He looks just the sort to do so.'

When breakfast was over, Mayer took Noel outside with him, and they had a long conversation together.

'I feel that I owe you an apology, Mr. Johnson,' Mayer began, 'for not having answered your letter. I mislaid it, and could not remember the name of the store at which you were working. Why did you leave it?'

Noel told him.

'And did I understand you to say that you walked the whole way here?'

'I could not afford to travel any other way.'

'Well, now, I *am* vexed,' said Mayer, 'that everything seems to have gone crooked. I should have liked to have had you here very much; but I must tell you exactly how I am placed. I don't remember whether I told you that I went to England to have an operation performed.'

'No, you never told me,' replied Noel; but he felt a pang of self-reproach as he remembered the kindly interest Mayer had taken in his affairs, while he, wrapped up in his own troubles, had never asked Mayer a single question about himself, or taken the slightest interest in his concerns. Noel was beginning to find out that he had been very egotistical all his life; he was also finding out that to be egotistical does not answer when you are knocking about the world in a destitute condition, dependent on the kindness of your fellow creatures.

'The operation was successful,' Mayer continued, 'and I thought when I returned home I should be able to take up all my work again as before. I soon found, however, that I could not. The mischief is checked, to be sure, but my health is not the same, and never will be the same again. I required

help, and I thought of you at once ; but, as I told you, I had lost your letter, and, moreover, I thought that as you had a good situation in a large store it would be a great pity to leave it to come to an out-of-the-way place like this, and to work which might never lead to anything better.'

'Well, as it happens,' said Noel, 'the store would never have led to anything better for me.'

'No, as it happens—but we were not to know that. Well, I wrote to a nephew of mine in Johannesburg to ask if he would come down here, but he was not inclined to leave his present occupation. However, he suggested this man Lester, and here he is. I would much rather have had you.'

'Mr. Lester is not the kind of man one would expect to find on a farm,' observed Noel; 'he seems out of place somehow.'

'Oh, he is one of the loafers,' returned Mayer, 'an extremely clever man, highly educated, could have done anything he liked ; but he has evidently thrown away his life somehow.'

'Drink, I suppose,' suggested Noel.

'N—no, I don't think it is drink. I don't know what is wrong with him ; but he has evidently reached that stage now when he will loaf anywhere for the sake of getting his bread and butter without exertion. I must say, however, that he does his work in the store all right ; but of course it is no position for a man of his age and his abilities.'

'In the meanwhile, as regards myself,' said Noel, 'I must tell you that Mr. Botha has offered me a home. He wants an assistant, too, his last one having left ; and I am inclined to accept his offer.'

Mayer considered.

'I suppose it is the best thing you can do,' he remarked, 'but it is a pity you cannot be with an English family.'

'Oh, I don't know,' replied Noel, 'I like the Bothas very much so far. They have been exceedingly kind to me. And it is a good opportunity to acquire the language.'

'Oh, Botha is a good sort, no doubt,' Mayer admitted, 'and kind they are, as you say. Well, Mr. Johnson, I am glad we shall be neighbours, though not very near ones, and I hope we shall often see you here.'

Noel, while responding heartily to these kind expressions, could not help thinking what strange times he had fallen upon, when he was glad to make friends of people like the Bothas and the Mayers. Not that he considered them in any way his inferiors ; but somehow they were so entirely out of his line, so utterly different from any of his former friends and associates ; some of whom would, no doubt, have looked down from a great height on Mr. Mayer or Mr. Botha.

'Here is one of those tiresome Jews,' observed Mayer, rising, as a Jew pedlar came along the road, with an antediluvian little cart, a woe-begone donkey, which looked as if it might be antediluvian too, and an enormous load.

'Poor little beast,' said Noel, 'what a shame !'

The Jew walked alongside with a big stick, with which he thwacked the donkey at regular intervals, without producing the slightest perceptible alteration in its pace ; it was not able to go faster, and could hardly have gone slower without stopping, which it presently did.

Miss Lydia came out on the stoep, with that interest in every passer-by which grows upon people who live in lonely neighbourhoods.

'What do you think of the Jews, Mr. Johnson ?' she asked Noel suddenly.

Noel collected his ideas hastily. He had never given two consecutive thoughts to the Jews in his life.

'If that is a specimen, I don't think much of them,' he returned good-humouredly.

Miss Lydia chuckled.

'Mr. Johnson not think much of the Jews,' she repeated to her sister, who had also arrived on the scene.

'How do you like this hot weather ?' was the next question.

'I don't mind it when I don't have to walk in it,' replied Noel ; 'I can stand heat better than cold.'

'More cold than heat in England—isn't there ?' continued Miss Mayer, rather making the assertion than asking the question.

Before Noel could commence a disquisition on the

English climate Miss Lydia broke in with a different subject.

'Mr. Botha says you walked all the way from Capetown, Mr. Johnson.'

'Yes, I did,' replied Noel.

'Oh my ! How far is it ?' asked Miss Mayer.

'About five hundred miles, I believe.'

'Oh my !' repeated Miss Mayer. It seemed to be her favourite exclamation.

'We should think that a good walk, shouldn't we ?' observed Miss Lydia jocosely to her sister.

'Five hundred miles—oh my !' was Miss Mayer's response. And so on, *ad infinitum*. Noel began to think that the old ladies would be rather wearisome to live with ; a good deal more wearisome than Hester Botha.

He had plenty of fun with Hester when he got home that evening. He took off the Miss Mayers capitally, sending her into fits of laughter, and bringing a smile even to Botha's sober face. Botha had not much sense of humour ; the Dutch character is too ponderous for humour.

Noel having decided to pitch his tent, for the present at all events, at Wolve Kop, sent to Capetown for his portmanteau, which arrived in due course. He thus rejoiced in one suit of clothes which fitted him ; and proceeded to apply himself to the study of the combined sciences of farming and book-keeping.

## CHAPTER XX

‘ Our little lives are kept in equipoise  
 By opposite attractions and desires :  
 The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,  
 And the more noble instinct that aspires.’

NORA’s school career could hardly be termed a brilliant success. Mindful of her promise to Alice, she did apply herself to her books fairly well ; but she was really not clever, and never took a high place in the school. It is true that she evinced a sudden interest and capacity in one or two unexpected directions, such as physiology and natural science ; but proficiency in these subjects alone did not enable her to pass well in the examinations, when the total of marks in all subjects was added up.

With regard to her conduct, she was rather a worry to the mistresses, though they all liked her. One or two of them complained that ‘ Nora was so very childish for her age.’ She was so completely possessed sometimes by a pure desire for fun, perfectly harmless in itself, that she seemed able to think of nothing else for the time being ; and she had most original ideas for obtaining fun, and most original ways of carrying them out. If she realised that she had vexed any of her superiors she was sincerely sorry ; and in all her pranks there was never the slightest approach to meanness or deception.

With her schoolmates she was not universally a favourite. Those who got on with her, and became her friends, were devoted to her ; those whom she did not get on with called her ‘ stand-offish.’

And it was quite true that, with all her childish gaiety of spirits and irresponsibility, Nora had a very good idea of keeping anyone at arm’s length if she wished to do so, and with all her apparent frankness she sometimes showed an

extraordinary reticence. As an instance of this, which may be thought almost incredible, she never told anyone, not even her most intimate friend, that she was an heiress. Everyone could see that she was well dressed, and had a plentiful supply of pocket-money, but they merely concluded that her relations were well off; no one had the remotest idea that she possessed thirty thousand pounds of her own.

When the June holidays came round, Gronow kept his promise, and came himself to fetch her home; but shortly before Christmas Nora had a letter from her father, asking her to spend part of the Christmas holidays with him at Limoen Kop. The Mayers, he said, had begged him to ask her, and would be pleased to see her.

Nora accepted the invitation; she was always happy on a farm, and she was very fond of her father, though quite aware of his weakness of character. He had two or three times written to her for money, but she had faithfully kept her word to Gronow, though she had found it very hard and disagreeable to do so; and Gronow, so far, had not allowed her to give her father any money.

The Christmas holidays, being in South Africa the summer holidays, are the longest, and Nora thought of spending half of them at Limoen Kop and the other half in Johannesburg. When Alice, however, heard that she was going to the Mayers, she wrote, though very unwillingly, to tell her that it would be better for her to make up her mind to spend all the holidays there.

'Gronow cannot get away to fetch you,' she said, 'and though you might find someone to travel with, this town is now in so disturbed a state, and public affairs are looking so bad, that it is really safer for you to be away. Some people are leaving the place, and I may have to do so, though I *hope* not. Dear Nora, you will not be more disappointed than I am. I was so looking forward to seeing you again!'

This was the Christmas of '98 and the New Year of '99.

Nora was very much disappointed, but she was unselfish enough to write a cheerful, affectionate letter to Alice, without a word of complaint in it. To herself, however, she said:

'All the same, if trouble really comes, and I think that Alice wants me, I shall go to her, school or no school.'

When the Christmas season came round again, Noel vividly recalled the previous Christmas, when he had started on his memorable walk. His present fairly prosperous condition should, by contrast, have made him very thankful, yet somehow it had not that effect.

Noel was not in love with his adopted country yet. The season had been a dry one, and the Karoo, which had not at any time much charm for him, became the embodiment of monotony and weariness to him. He began to hate the great silent wastes, the harsh outlines of the kopjes, the eternal blue glare overhead, and yellow glare beneath. Besides this, the life was uncongenial to him; he did not take to farming more kindly than to storekeeping, it was all alike a deadly grind to him; indeed, it is probable that he would have felt the same about any kind of regular work, not having borne the yoke in his youth.

It was Hester who made his life bearable to him at the present time. Hester was always the same, always cheerful, always kind; to laugh and joke with Hester, to make love to her, by no means seriously, to have pretence quarrels with her, and make them up again, was the only flavour of existence at Wolve Kop. Sometimes Noel thought himself really in love with her; once or twice he had considered the possibility of settling down as a colonial farmer, with Hester as his wife, but the prospect did not excite his enthusiasm.

One thing that tried Noel's patience in the Botha household was the rather obtrusive religious element. There was a great delivery of long and rather pompous prayers, and a very slow and nasal delivery of vocal psalms, every evening, with an extra allowance on Sundays. Noel used to get out of it if he could, but he was aware that he gave offence by doing so. Botha kept a strict hand over the young fellow, and was very particular about his work. Noel seldom got a holiday, and for this reason he had not been over to Limoen Kop more than three or four times during the whole year. When Christmas drew near Noel felt a sudden desire to spend it with English people in an English way, and also to

get out of the way of Botha's psalmody. He therefore told him, with much more decision of manner than was his wont, that he wanted a few days' holiday, and Botha granted it without making any difficulty.

Noel had a horse of his own now, which it afforded him some pleasure to ride. On Christmas Eve he mounted it, and rode away to Limoen Kop.

'Well, now, I *am* glad you've come,' was Miss Mayer's hearty greeting to the young man. 'Lydia wanted me to write and ask you to spend Christmas here, and I was more than half inclined to do so; but I wasn't sure how Botha would take it.'

'I did not care how he took it,' said Noel. 'I wanted to come, and I came.'

'There another visitor here, Mr. Johnson,' Miss Mayer informed him as soon as she had welcomed him, 'a young lady.'

'And a very fine young lady,' added Miss Lydia.

'Indeed,' returned Noel, not altogether delighted to find that there was a stranger staying there, 'and who is she, if I may ask?'

'Mr. Lester's daughter,' said Miss Lydia.

'Spending her holidays from school,' added Miss Mayer.

'Oh, a child,' thought Noel, and lost interest in her.

'They out for a ride together now,' continued Miss Mayer; 'she rides very well, does Nora.'

'Nora!' exclaimed Noel.

'Yes, that's her name. Do you think it a pretty name? Isn't it Irish?'

'I believe it is,' said Noel absently; he was repeating to himself, 'Nora Lester.' Was it only a rather strange coincidence, or could it possibly be—the heiress? But the heiress must be at least seventeen or eighteen now, and was hardly likely to be at school; nevertheless, Noel was consumed with impatience to see her, and grew nearly distracted with the effort of listening to and answering his hostesses' ceaseless string of unconnected and objectless questions.

At last there was a clatter of horses' hoofs outside; Noel went out to the stoep, just in time to see Nora spring from her saddle, disdaining assistance.

'Yes, we have had a lovely ride,' she said, in answer to Mr. Mayer's query if she had enjoyed herself, 'and I believe I have quite tired out father.'

She looked round laughingly at Lester, who replied cheerfully, 'Yes, you don't seem to realise that a father can't be as young as his own daughter.'

He looked brighter and better himself, nevertheless, than he had done for a long time. Noel observed this afterwards, but not at first, because Nora occupied his attention. Noel was astonished when he saw Nora, because he recognised her at once. He was glad to see, however, that she had not the slightest recollection of him ; and, indeed, he was much more altered than she since their last meeting. Nora did not take much notice of Mr. Johnson when she was introduced to him ; she bowed indifferently, and continued her conversation with Mr. Mayer. Noel, however, was not one to remain in the same house with an attractive girl and allow her to pass him over ; besides, he was determined to find out whether she really was the heiress or not.

Mr. Mayer unconsciously helped him at dinner-time by giving the conversation a personal turn.

'This is a bit different to your last Christmas, Mr. Johnson,' he observed cheerfully.

'Yes, indeed,' returned Noel, who did not mind recalling those hard times now ; 'I was just starting on my tramp.'

'Your five-hundred-mile tramp ?' asked Lester.

Noel saw that Nora was looking at him.

'Yes,' he replied carelessly, 'and I have come to the conclusion that I enjoyed it. I really did enjoy a great deal of it, except when I was hungry.'

He had an instinctive feeling that Nora would not look down upon him for having been hard up and sometimes hungry, but that, on the contrary, it would rather excite her sympathy and admiration.

He went on to speak of the kindness and hospitality of the Dutch farmers, without which he could hardly have got through his journey at all, certainly not without much greater hardships.

'I think the English farmers are just as hospitable in

this country,' observed Lester, 'and in any colony. It is a necessity, and becomes a habit of colonial life.'

'Oh, I don't doubt it,' rejoined Noel; 'one could not doubt it here,' he added, with a pleasant smile at Mr. Mayer, 'only I happened to come across many more Dutch houses than English.'

'Because there are many more,' said Lester.

'The Dutch are hospitable, certainly,' put in Nora, joining in the conversation for the first time; 'but I don't know what else they are that one can like—in the Transvaal, anyway.'

'Prejudiced,' thought Noel, but aloud he said courteously, 'Well, I have not been in the Transvaal, Miss Lester, but the Dutch appear to me to have many good qualities.'

'For instance?' she asked.

'They are brave, persevering, patient and—pious.'

'Prudent, parsimonious, and provoking,' finished Nora promptly. 'I grant you the piety, Mr. Johnson, if you admire it.'

'Well, I don't admire its manifestations,' Noel admitted, 'but I think it is genuine.'

'Are there a great many Dutch girls at the school, Nora?' asked Lester, who had been enjoying this little passage of arms.

'Any number of them.'

'And don't you like any of them?'

'I don't dislike them exactly, but they always remind me of a loaf of heavy bread—indigestible and uninteresting.'

'And give you the nightmare,' suggested Noel.

'How very discriminating you are, Mr. Johnson!' said Nora; 'if it is not an impertinent question, are you descended from the Dictionary?'

Mr. Mayer, who alone of the party knew Noel's history, was afraid that the young man might be hurt by this allusion to his descent; but Noel only laughed good-humouredly as he replied, 'I am sorry I cannot give you any precise information, Miss Lester, but if I am descended from the Dictionary, I am afraid it has been a very deep descent. It is not a case of reversion to type.'

'Type!' repeated Nora. 'Oh, if you are going to make puns—'

At this juncture, Miss Mayer, who had not half comprehended the foregoing remarks, and felt herself left out of it, introduced another subject by asking Noel if he had heard from his friends in England lately.

'I have no friends in England,' Noel replied; 'at least, I have only one, and I don't correspond with him.'

'Only one friend,' remarked Miss Mayer to her sister.

'That's not many,' returned her sister, and they both laughed.

'Well, only one who was a real friend to me when hard times came,' continued Noel, suddenly perceiving an opportunity, 'and that was the last man from whom I expected it—a little dried-up old lawyer named Abdy.'

He gave a quick, surreptitious glance at both Lester and Nora as he mentioned the lawyer's name. Lester made no sign; but Nora looked up quickly, opened her lips as if to speak, and closed them again.

That was enough for Noel. A Nora Lester who knew the name of Mr. Abdy must certainly be the Nora Lester of Miss Lanyon's will. There could hardly by any coincidence be a second.

The situation rather pleased him. She, the heiress, all unknowing, sitting opposite to him, the disinherited, and exchanging light chaff with him. He recalled, too, that other situation, when he, the disinherited, in disreputable rags, had rendered assistance to her, the heiress, at night in a railway station. She had forgotten the second situation and could not recognise the first.

His knowledge of her, compared with her ignorance of him, gave him a soothing sense of superiority to her.

'Father,' said Nora, later in the afternoon, 'do you think Mr. Johnson has any Dutch blood in him?'

'I have not the least idea what sort of blood he has in him,' returned Lester, 'and I think it is quite probable that his name is not Johnson at all, but Montmorency, or something of that description. He does not look at all Dutch, and he comes from England.'

'He seems very fond of the Dutch.'

'That is easily accounted for. He lives with Dutch people, the Bothas, who have been very kind to him; and Botha has a very good-looking daughter.'

'Oh, that is it!' observed Nora.

The next time she saw Noel she asked him: -

'Is it a nice farm where you live, Mr. Johnson?'

'Yes, it is quite a pretty place.'

'And nice people?'

'I think them nice, but you would not, because they are Dutch.'

'I never said the Dutch were not *nice*,' returned Nora severely, 'I said they were—'

'Indigestible,' inserted Noel quickly.

Nora was not disconcerted.

'I have no doubt that Miss Botha is very light and wholesome,' she continued gravely.

'She is not light, she is very dark,' replied Noel, with a glance at the yellow halo which was still Nora's distinguishing characteristic; 'but I do not think you would find her heavy, she is so very lively.'

'I am simply consumed with a desire to see her,' said Nora.

'And I am sure she would have an equal desire to see you,' rejoined Noel politely.

'If only she had the advantage of being aware of my existence,' observed Nora.

It was just at this moment that there suddenly recurred to Noel's memory some idle words which he had never once thought of since they were uttered. It was Miss Calthrop's remark, 'You had better find out the heiress and marry her.' Why should that absurd old woman, and her still more absurd remarks, come to his mind just now, when he would least have wished to remember them? He put away the recollection with a sense of annoyance, and the more he tried to put it away the more persistently it returned.

His acquaintance with Nora improved rapidly during the next few days. They were the only two young people in the house, and it was natural that they should enjoy each other's

society. Nora was quite able to appreciate the delightful eccentricities of the two sisters, and had many a laugh over them with Noel ; but she always made fun of them in a kindly spirit, and with no lack of respect.

Noel found that the sense of superiority afforded him by his knowledge of their mutual position frequently deserted him as he grew to know more of Nora. On the contrary, she often made him feel that she was the superior, a feeling which on the whole he resented. He had not felt that with a girl before, certainly not with a girl so young as Nora, who was only seventeen. He told himself that she was too independent and original for a young girl, that he preferred the gentle yielding sort, who always tacitly acknowledge the superiority of the male creature.

Now Hester was very different. She never gave Noel that uncomfortable feeling that he might be a good deal better and worthier than he was ; on the contrary, she managed to inspire him with the idea that she thought him quite perfect as he was. And in every way she was a much more accessible sort of girl than Nora : a girl with whom a fellow could enjoy a thorough-going flirtation. Noel had stolen more than one kiss from Hester ; he would never have dared to take such a liberty with Nora, however well he might know her. Nora was ready for any amount of fun ; but even in two days' acquaintance Noel had somehow become aware that she would never allow any undue familiarity.

So he sometimes thought that it would be rather a relief to return to Hester and easy enjoyment. And yet he had a suspicion that Hester's society after Nora's would be rather like small ale after champagne, like descending to the soft airs of the valley, after breathing the bracing air of the mountain-top. The valley is easier of access, and provocative of a pleasing indolence and satisfaction ; but the hardier races of man have been nurtured upon the mountain sides.

## CHAPTER XXI

'These are the parents to these children,  
Which accidentally are met together.'

'She now shall be my sister, not my wife.'

NOEL stayed a week at Limoen Kop. On New Year's Day he started early, and rode up to the stoep at Wolve Kop just in time for breakfast.

Hester was on the stoep alone, and welcomed him with such evident pleasure, that Noel could not help feeling a thrill of the same. It was really delightful to see her pretty, bright face again, and it obscured the image of Nora for the moment. 'Truant!' she exclaimed, shaking her head at him, 'aren't you ashamed to show yourself?'

'Is that all the New Year greeting you give me?' he asked, dismounting, and taking both her hands.

'It is all you deserve,' she returned, smiling at him.

'Give me something I don't deserve then,' he said, bending over her.

Hester murmured 'For shame, Mr. Johnson!' but of course Noel got the kiss he wanted; and caught himself wondering, directly afterwards, what Nora would have thought if she had witnessed the little scene. He put the fancy away from him almost angrily. What was Nora's opinion to him?

Botha received him cordially, hoped he had enjoyed himself, and asked when the Mayers were coming over to see them.

'In a day or two, I believe,' replied Noel; 'the whole crowd of them.'

'A crowd of three!' said Hester laughing.

'Five,' amended Noel.

'Who are the other two?' asked Botha; 'ah, I forgot Mr. Lester.'

'Mr. Lester and his daughter,' returned Noel.

'Has Mr. Lester a daughter?' asked Hester, surprised.

'Yes. She is at school somewhere near Capetown, and is spending the holidays at Limoen Kop.'

'What is she like?'

Noel hesitated.

'I am not much good at description,' he said; 'she is tall and fair; but you will see for yourself when she comes.'

'Now we know what kept you so long at Limoen Kop,' observed Hester archly.

Noel was not inclined to be chaffed about Nora. He turned off Hester's remark with some good-humoured reply, and changed the subject.

If Hester was at all curious, her curiosity was soon satisfied. The very next morning a procession arrived at the door, led by a cart, in which Mr. Mayer drove his two sisters, while Nora and her father, on horseback, brought up the rear.

They received a hearty welcome from Botha and his daughter, which quite dispelled a little shy stiffness that hung about Nora, and thawed her into an equal friendliness.

Noel observed the two girls together with great interest.

They certainly formed a striking contrast, the decided blonde against the decided brunette. Hester was some three or four years the elder, but Nora was half a head taller; Nora had the most graceful figure, while Hester had the prettiest features. Both girls showed to the best advantage that day. Hester was always an ideal hostess, lively, amiable, and attentive. Nora had evidently made up her mind to be pleased, and to please; not one caustic remark passed her lips; she enjoyed herself frankly and thoroughly like a child.

Yet all the time she was taking notes too. While Noel was watching her and Hester, she was comparing two others of the party, her father and Mr. Botha. Both were unquestionably fine-looking men, of about the same age, yet what a marked difference between them! Lester had, strictly speaking, the handsomest features, and the most refined and intellectual cast of countenance; but Nora was forced

to acknowledge to herself that there was far more strength of character in Botha's large and rugged outlines, and in his steady eye. There was even in this latter a somewhat relentless expression, which made Nora feel that she might shrink from him under some circumstances ; she had occasionally seen her father look very hard too, but it was a different kind of hardness.

Another thing that Nora observed was the friendly and familiar relation between Noel and Hester. She knew that they had been living in the same house together for nearly a year, and it seemed quite natural that they should be fond of one another, and perhaps engaged, or soon to be so. Nora thought they would be a very well-matched couple, except that Noel seemed rather boyish beside Hester, who had very womanly ways, and was probably a few months older than Noel.

The day passed very pleasantly. Miss Mayer and Miss Lydia asked so many questions that Noel declared, out of their hearing, that the Shorter Catechism could be nothing to it. Hester did not understand the reference, but Nora did, and enjoyed the joke. They found out who liked pumpkin, and who did not ; who preferred hot weather, and who preferred cold ; whether Noel still liked England better than Africa, and whether Nora remembered England, and which country *she* liked best. Nora remembered England well enough, but she preferred South Africa.

'What made you think of living out here?' Hester asked her.

'I have to live in this country on account of my health,' Nora replied demurely.

Noel looked steadily at her a moment, and smiled.

'It seems to have had the desired effect,' he remarked.

'Looks very well, he thinks,' said Miss Mayer to her sister, and they all laughed.

'It is quite true, however,' put in Lester quietly ; 'if you had seen Nora when we first landed in Capetown, you would have thought, as I did, that she was going into a rapid consumption.'

'I remember that I was really ill then,' said Nora, 'but I don't think I have ever been ill since.'

When they were taking their leave, in the evening, Noel found an opportunity of saying to Nora, as he assisted her to mount :

'Well, Miss Lester, do you think you will be able to digest Mr. Botha and his daughter ?'

'Yes, indeed,' she returned in no bantering tone, but quite earnestly ; 'they are by far the nicest Dutch people I have met. Look there !' she added, directing his attention to Mr. Botha and Mr. Mayer, who were just shaking hands ; 'if all Englishmen and all Dutchmen were like those two, we should not have all this talk about race antagonism.'

'Is not that merely talk, and nothing else?' suggested Noel.

'I fear not,' put in Mr. Lester, who had overheard the last remark as he reined up beside his daughter, 'and I observe that Mr. Mayer and Mr. Botha, who have been good neighbours for a great many years, always avoid politics in their conversation together.'

'That struck me too,' agreed Noel.

After the visitors were gone, Hester said to Noel of her own accord :

'What a nice girl Miss Lester is ! So frank and unaffected. Don't you think so, father ?'

'She is not at all a commonplace girl,' was Botha's reply. 'I fancy she will make some hearts ache when she is a little older.'

Noel saw Nora twice again during the holidays. Once he went to Limoen Kop with the Bothas, and once Nora and her father rode over to Wolve Kop, for her to say goodbye before going back to school.

Noel hoped she had enjoyed her holidays.

'Immensely, thank you,' replied Nora ; 'the only drawback has been that I was so disappointed not to spend part of them with Alice.'

'That is your sister ?' asked Hester sympathetically.

'Yes ; she is married, and lives in Johannesburg.'

Noel knew that Nora had a married sister, he had heard her speak of Alice more than once ; but he had

not the slightest idea that Alice's husband was Gronow Neilson.

The holidays over, things resumed their usual course, and Noel began to drift back into his previous condition of apathetic discontent, relieved by flirting with Hester. He saw no chance of changing his condition or improving his prospects, and he had not the energy, the initiative, to strike out any new line for himself. He was afraid of encountering worse hardships than those he had already endured. It would have required misery such as he had undergone in Capetown to stimulate him to a fresh revolt against circumstances ; and life was not miserable here, it was bearable and attended with physical comfort.

Sometimes he thought to himself, 'Nora would despise me for grovelling on like this ; if she were in my place she would try and do something different.'

But Nora was away, and Hester was at hand to brighten and sweeten all the little disagreeables of existence with her unfailing good humour and her ready charm.

And about this time an event, a discovery, which fell, as it were, from the clouds, when no one dreamed of looking for it, exercised a powerful influence on Noel's character and his future career.

It was one evening at the end of February, after a parching day, such as often comes at the latter end of summer, that Noel was slowly wending his way back to the homestead after visiting an outlying kraal and inspecting the stock. He had performed this duty for Botha, who had been away since the early morning, attending a sale at a neighbouring farm. Just as he rode up to the house, Botha also rode up from an opposite direction. He looked worn and tired, and with a word of greeting to Noel, he threw the bridle to a coloured boy, and went straight into the house.

At supper he was very silent, though this was nothing unusual ; Noel was tired and silent too, and Hester fell in with the mood of both, as she had a knack of doing. Afterwards they sat on the stoep. It was an oppressively warm night, cloudy and starless. Hester had brought out a low stool, and sat at her father's feet, leaning against his knee.

'You are tired, father,' she said presently, 'it has been a long, hot day.'

'I am tired and sad, too,' he replied. 'I met a man to-day, whom I have not seen for many years, De Villiers is his name. We were great friends when we were both young, and he recalled the past to me. He wanted to marry Johanna in those days.'

'Aunt Johanna,' asked Hester softly, 'the one that died when I was a baby?'

'Yes, my child, the youngest and best-loved of my sisters. But it is always so. The Lord gave, and the Lord took away.'

'But you never really heard of her death, father, did you?'

'That made it worse. We lost her twice—first by marriage, and then by her mysterious death. Mysterious I can hardly call it, for really there was no doubt about it.'

'But why do you say you lost her by her marriage?'

'Because, my daughter, she married a worthless man, who would certainly have broken her heart had he lived long enough. No good woman could have led a happy life as the wife of Christian Dupleix.'

Noel, who had heard the foregoing conversation without listening to it, was suddenly startled into vivid attention.

'Christian Dupleix!' he exclaimed aloud.

'Yes, an Englishman of French descent,' replied Botha, looking at him in surprise. 'What do you know of him?'

'I have heard his name in England,' replied Noel, with sudden caution. 'At least, it is an uncommon name, so I thought it might be the same man of whom you speak. I met someone belonging to him.'

'It is very probably the same, as his relations were English,' returned Botha, 'and it is, as you say, an uncommon name. He always said he had a very wealthy aunt in England, but one never knew how much to believe of what he said.'

'His people never knew what became of him, I believe,' observed Noel, who did not think it well to tell all he knew; 'he disappeared altogether, and was never heard of.'

'I believe I could inform them,' said Botha, 'if there are any still living who care to know.'

'I hardly think there are now,' answered Noel; 'but what did happen to him then?'

'This Christian Dupleix of whom I speak,' said Botha deliberately, 'although quite young in years, was old in wickedness. He led a wild and dissipated life. To our sorrow, he gained the affections of my youngest sister, Johanna. He wanted to marry her on account of her position, which was a good one. My parents forbade the marriage; but Johanna—poor, foolish girl—went away with him.'

He paused, and sighed heavily. Then he continued:

'We never, any of us, saw Johanna again, although she and her husband remained in this country for two years. Then he committed some deed which brought him within reach of the law, and he determined to fly from the country. This we learned from a letter which my sister wrote to us just before they sailed. Dupleix took passages to England, under a false name, for himself, his wife, and their infant son, on a small trading vessel which took no other passengers. She had a long and stormy passage to England, and in the end was wrecked when she had almost reached port. As far as we could ever hear, all on board were drowned.'

'That was very sad,' said Noel sympathetically. 'Do you remember the name of the vessel?' He thought he would write all this to Mr. Abdy.

'The *Roumania*, Captain Deane,' replied Botha.

'*Roumania!*' exclaimed Noel, startled out of all reserve. 'Why, that was the name of the ship from which I was washed ashore!'

There was a minute of dead silence, while all three tried to realise the import of these last words. Then Noel said in a low voice:

'There might have been another *Roumania*.'

'Wrecked on the south coast of England on Christmas Day, 1878?' asked Botha.

'No; it is true,' replied Noel. Then after another pause he said;

'There might have been another baby.'

'Impossible,' returned Botha. 'I still have Johanna's letter in which she says that she will be the only woman on board. There were no other passengers, as it was only a cargo vessel, and the captain gave up his own cabin to them. It is inconceivable that the captain or any of his crew should have had a baby nine months old with them.'

Noel was silent. Hester gave a little excited gasp.

'Noel,' said Botha solemnly, addressing him for the first time by his Christian name, 'you are no doubt my dead sister's son. The hand of the Lord has brought you to us.'

Noel was conscious of a rebellious wish that the Lord had left it alone. He did not mind being the son of Christian Dupleix, which meant a great deal more to him than he could yet realise; but he was not at all sure that he was pleased to find that he was partly a Dutchman, and Botha's nephew. That was coming to rather close quarters.

'Then I suppose I may conclude that my name is Noel Dupleix,' he said, almost coldly. 'It will be quite a new sensation to have a real name. And you can perhaps tell me when I was born?'

'On the 12th of February, '78,' replied Botha, 'therefore you are just twenty-one.'

'But is your name really Noel?' put in Hester, speaking for the first time.

'I was christened by that name in England,' returned Noel quickly.

'You probably have no other,' said Botha; 'I do not think you were ever christened in this country; and my sister only speaks of you as "Baby."'

Hester laid a gentle hand on Noel's arm.

'I was right, you see—cousin,' she said softly; 'you are not quite English after all. You are half Dutch.'

'And partly French,' added Noel; 'I seem to be a kind of mongrel.'

'We have French blood, too,' observed Botha; 'my mother was a Miss du Toit, of a French Huguenot family.'

'Oh, it is wonderful!' cried Hester; 'and to think we

should have lived together a whole year, and then have found out this ! It is like a fairy tale, is it not, father ? '

' It is much better than a fairy tale, my child,' replied Botha, who was more strongly moved than he would show. ' You are not like your mother,' he added, looking long and earnestly at Noel, ' and yet there has always been to me something familiar in your voice and gestures. It must have been that they resemble hers.'

At family worship that night Botha offered up a long thanksgiving to the Almighty for restoring Noel to the bosom of his family ; a thanksgiving to which Noel, it is to be feared, paid little attention. He was impatient to be alone and think out his future course of action.

He lay awake almost the whole night, too much excited to sleep.

Wealth once more ! Freedom once more ! Life once more, as he had hitherto known it. For he was Christian Dupleix's son and heir, and he could go to Nora Lester, and claim the half of her fortune—fifteen thousand pounds.

He decided that he would not tell this just at present to his new-found relations. They would know it all in good time.

It was a slight drawback to his exultation that Botha should prove to be his uncle ; but that Hester should be his cousin rather pleased him than otherwise. A cousin was almost the same as a sister. He would make her handsome presents, but he would not marry her now. He would not marry at all, for a long time to come. He would go home to England, and enjoy life as he had done before. Good-bye to the dreary Karoo, to the farming and store-keeping ! No more drudgery for him !

How passing strange, he reflected, that Miss Lanyon should have picked him out of an orphanage, and brought him up, without ever knowing that he was her great-nephew ! That in disinheriting him, she should have inserted a clause in her will that restored to him the half of his inheritance ! How strange that her wrong-headed action should have been the cause of bringing him out to this place ; and that in this place he should have met

the heiress, and have taken up his abode, unknowingly, with his mother's family !

What would Nora say when she heard it ? Oh, she would not mind. She would have plenty left, and she would be glad that he should have what was due to him.

In such whirl of thought Noel tossed on his bed until daylight ; and then, as he fell into an uneasy doze, the whimsical fancy came to him,

' I must really write to Miss Calthrop. I expect she will want her five thousand pounds.'

## CHAPTER XXII

' Whither away, delight ?  
Thou cam'st but now ; wilt thou so soon depart,  
And give me up to-night ?  
For many weeks of ling'ring pain and smart  
But one half-hour of comfort for my heart ? '

HESTER was standing among the thorn bushes, hanging out some handkerchiefs she had been washing, early the next morning, when a light step came behind her, a slim brown hand caressed her cheek, and turned her face gently round, while a laughing voice said :

' A cousin is nearly the same as a brother, you know. Good morning, cousin ! '

' Foolish boy ! ' replied Hester, releasing herself from his embrace, but not at all displeased. ' One would think you were a different person to what you were yesterday ! '

' So I am,' returned Noel promptly ; ' you people who have known all about yourselves all your lives have no idea what it is to discover your identity after twenty-one years of blank obscurity. Yesterday I was Mr. Nobody of Nowhere. This morning I am Noel Dupleix and—Hester's cousin ! '

' Noel ! I can't have any more of this nonsense. There—now you can be satisfied ! ' and Hester ran off to the house, not a whit offended by her cousin's kisses, but wondering rather at his high spirits, to which she had not the key. Was it only that he was so fond of her, so pleased to be related to her ? He had not seemed particularly pleased when the discovery first dawned upon him; and if he really wanted to marry her, which she sometimes thought he did, what difference did this knowledge make as regarded that ?

It was natural that the subject should come up again when the little party assembled at breakfast. They had no

guests, in the shape of passing travellers or wandering Jews that morning, so they could talk without restraint.

'I remembered last night,' said Noel, 'another little piece of corroborative evidence which I had forgotten. The clothes I had on when I was picked up were marked with 'D.'

'The captain's name was Deane,' observed Hester.

'Yes, but as the captain had not his wife with him, he is not likely to have had his baby,' replied her father.

'That little bit of evidence would make the chain complete,' added Noel, 'if I could ascertain that the captain of my *Roumania* was named Deane.'

'If you could get the English papers of that date,' said Botha, 'you could find out all the necessary details. But really, I think we need no further proof for ourselves—and for the world, what does it matter?'

'Oh, well, I want the world, as far as I am concerned with it, to be satisfied who I am,' returned Noel; 'one can always find old papers and things at the British Museum and places of that sort.'

He was thinking to himself that Mr. Abdy would make all the necessary researches for him, and that he would write to the old fellow by next mail. At first he thought of writing to Nora herself, but that went sorely against the grain; then he thought of riding over to Limoen Kop and communicating his intelligence to Mr. Lester; but he had already divined that Lester was a sort of ne'er-do-well, and had no real control over his daughter. The simplest and wisest course undoubtedly was to write to Mr. Abdy, and put the whole affair into his hands. He was the proper person to write to Nora, and afterwards, as Noel had become personally acquainted with her, he could write to her himself, and express a polite regret at being compelled to claim half her fortune.

He rose up and went out, but Botha lit his pipe and sat still, thinking. Hester was busying herself about the room.

'If we had known this sooner, Hester,' said Botha presently, 'it might have made a difference?'

'What sort of a difference, father?'

' If I had known that this young fellow had Dutch blood, and was your cousin, I should have been rather pleased for you to have married him.'

Hester pouted a little.

' I don't think Noel will ever do much for himself as a farmer,' she said.

' Neither do I ; but I could have put him in the way of making money at some other kind of work. And marriage would have attached him to us completely.'

Hester came and sat down by her father.

' This will bind him to us more, don't you think so ? '

' Yes, I hope so. He will hardly be willing to betray the only blood relations he has.'

' What about his father's rich relations in England ? '

' He seemed to think there were none of them left. And I do not wish to turn his thoughts towards them.'

' Will he really be of use to you, Father ? '

' I will make him of use. I do not think he would be much of a fighter, but he ought to be a good spy. In any case we *must* keep him on our side now, for he could do us a great deal of harm if he went over to the other side.'

' He does not know much, does he ? '

' We cannot be sure how much he knows, living in the house as he does. I should not like to trust to his ignorance.'

There was a minute's silence, and then Hester said softly :

' If only it could be done without war ! Shall we really have war soon, father ? '

' Why, Hester, I thought you were all ready to fight yourself ! Yes, my child, we shall have war before this year is out. A few more weeks or months of parleying and promising, to amuse these English blockheads, and make them believe we dare not fight them, and then we shall be perfectly ready—armed, prepared, at every point—and then——'

' Then for a united South Africa, under the *Vierkleur* ! ' exclaimed Hester, answering the gleam of his eye. ' Then for the dream of my father's life ! '

' Of many lives besides your father's, child,' he replied,

patting her head, ‘but we shall have to fight first. The English are but poor soldiers, but they are a greedy and ambitious nation, and they will not give up this country without a struggle, you may be sure.’

‘They must have been good soldiers once,’ observed Hester thoughtfully. ‘How did they get India and all their great Empire?’

‘They have deteriorated very much since those days,’ said Botha oracularly. ‘Have we not seen it in this country? Have we not beaten them before, when we were not nearly so well prepared as we are now?’

‘There is no doubt that the Free State will join?’ asked Hester.

‘Not a shadow of a doubt. I have absolutely certain information on the subject.’

Hester was very proud to be trusted by her father even thus far. Of course he did not tell her the details of all his proceedings; but she knew that he was an accredited agent of the Transvaal Government, that he had a list of all the Dutch farmers for many miles round who had passed their word to join in a general rising when the signal should be given, and that he had secretly supplied them all with arms and ammunition. Noel, speaking English perfectly, and having English ways, was to be made useful as a spy.

That same night, after retiring to his room, Noel, whose thoughts were as far as possible from plots or wars of supremacy, sat writing a long letter to Mr. Abdy, in which he detailed all the circumstances leading up to the discovery of his identity.

‘It reads like a romance,’ he said to himself, smiling, as he read it over. He reflected whether he should tell Mr. Abdy that he had, by a strange coincidence, made the acquaintance of Miss Lester; but he decided that he would not say anything about that in this letter. It was irrelevant, and of no consequence to the matter in hand. There was a post-cart that passed Wolve Kop twice a week, which brought and took away the letters. It was due the next morning, and as it was the day for the English mail Noel was anxious to have his letter ready. He completed, signed, and

fastened it up, and after that he went to bed and dreamed about it.

About seven o'clock in the morning the post-cart arrived. Wolve Kop was one of the places where the horses were spanned out for an hour, so that one had time to answer a letter if it was of importance. The post-bag lay on the table, and Noel was just about to fetch his letter to Mr. Abdy and put it in, when Hester, who was sorting the post, held something out to him.

'Here is an English letter for you, Noel.'

'An English letter!' he exclaimed in surprise; but his surprise was still greater when he saw that it was from Mr. Abdy.

'A case of mental telepathy,' he thought; 'but no, of course this was written nearly a month ago.'

He went on to the stoep, and sat there, reading Mr. Abdy's letter.

It was not a long letter, and was written in such a precise, formal, and business-like style, that Noel did not at first realise the tremendous import of the news it contained. It appeared that old Mr. Perry, the original partner in the firm, having been dead some two or three years, had been succeeded by his son, who had always been in the business, and was treated with the same confidence as his father had been before him. The son, however, had proved unworthy of the confidence. From one cause or another he had got heavily into debt, he had borrowed secretly from the funds of the firm, had become more and more involved, and had finally bolted to America with a large sum of money, leaving his partner practically ruined.

'I will not trouble you with all the details,' wrote Mr. Abdy, in his formal manner, 'but will merely explain to you my reason for writing you this information. When you left England I renewed to you my offer of a private loan, which you had already declined, and I told you that the offer would always hold good, if at any time you should feel inclined to avail yourself of it. Now, however, I am with great regret compelled to withdraw this offer. I have resolved, as far as is compatible with my duty to my family, to assist the firm

in this extremity with my private income, which will therefore admit of no other claims upon it. In this way I trust that we may yet be able to pay our creditors at least four or five shillings in the pound. I sincerely hope, however, that by this time you have made your own way in the world, and are in a position of comfort and security.'

Noel rose from his seat and walked away, bareheaded, into the blinding sunshine, not knowing where he was going. It would be hard to say what were his thoughts in these first minutes of comprehension. He did murmur to himself, 'Poor old Abdy!' and it is certain that he had a truly unselfish impulse of compassion for the old lawyer, thus beggared and dishonoured in his age, after a lifetime of honest labour.

When, however, he began to realise the meaning of the event to himself, he felt that this second blow was even more crushing than the first. The first time he had lost his fortune he had not known what poverty and labour were, and he had gone to meet them with a light heart; but now he knew what he had to go back to, what he had to look forward to all his life. For Noel had no belief in his own capacity to make money, he had always either counted on good fortune, or resigned himself to evil fortune, since he had realised the nature of hard work and competition for bread.

He excused himself from breakfast, on the plea of a bad headache, and went away into the veldt alone, to chew the cud of his bitter, bitter disappointment. After all, he would have to marry Hester, and settle down as a farmer. Hester might make life endurable, only she would probably grow stout and heavy and uninteresting, like the other Dutch *vrouws* whom he knew.

'And it would not even help me to marry the heiress now,' he thought, with the ghost of a smile, 'since she is an heiress no longer.'

And with that the recollection of Nora came to him with a sudden shock.

'I am a selfish brute!' he reflected remorsefully; 'it is much worse for her than for me.'

He recalled vividly the tall, graceful figure, the laughing, childlike face, crowned with that flaxen halo, and a pang shot through him so keen that it surprised him.

'Poor child, it's awfully rough on her!' he murmured.

He turned to Mr. Abdy's letter again, and on a second reading it occurred to him that there was a gleam of hope. Something was to be saved from the wreck. Noel began to reckon. Miss Lanyon's estate was something over thirty thousand pounds. If creditors received even four or five shillings in the pound, Nora would eventually get perhaps six or seven thousand pounds. And if he were to claim the half of that—well, even three thousand pounds would be something; it would save him from the necessity of manual labour, and he could speculate with it, perhaps, and make it more. Should he still reveal his identity to Mr. Abdy? Noel sat in the shadow of a big boulder, and leaned his head against the hard stone. He sat a long time like that, thinking; so quiet that the grasshoppers and butterflies settled on his clothes unnoticed.

At last he sat upright, and spoke aloud to the empty, wide veldt.

'I am a man,' he said, 'and I won't act like a beast. I can work, and she cannot. She is a girl, a child; she doesn't know what poverty and labour mean. If she gets six or seven thousand pounds, that will be a comfortable provision for her, and I am not going to be such a skunk as to ask her for half of it. If I can shut the mouths of Botha and his daughter, no one else need ever know who I am; I can be Mr. Johnson to Nora, and all the rest of the world, as long as I live.'

In spite of his trouble, this resolution was a comfort to him. He went home and destroyed his letter to Mr. Abdy. Would he have done as much for any other girl, a stranger, who was not Nora? He told himself that he would.

'Noel, what is the matter with you?' Hester asked him later in the day.

'My English letter had bad news in it,' Noel replied with apparent frankness; 'I have only one friend, as I told you, in England, and he is in great trouble.'

'I am very sorry,' said Hester kindly, but she was not satisfied with the explanation. Noel's moods during the last day or two were inexplicable to her.

That evening, when they were all three together, Noel said to Botha :

'I am going to ask you, as a favour, not to say anything about my relationship to you at present. For one thing it is not a dead certainty ; and then there may be some of—Mr. Dupleix's relations still living in England, and if I did anything premature it might cause unpleasantness.'

'I quite agree with you,' replied Botha, 'it is what I thought from the first. I will say nothing about it, nor will Hester.'

'And you will still be Mr. Johnson ?' said Hester.

'I will still be Mr. Johnson,' repeated Noel, smiling at her.

## CHAPTER XXIII

'Here comes a messenger ;  
 What news ?  
 Such news, my lord,  
 As grieves me to unfold.'

IT was on a Sunday evening, early in September of the same year, that Gronow and Alice sat together on the stoep in front of their little house in earnest conversation. Their faces were grave, as well they might be, for the war-cloud that had lowered so long on the horizon was almost overhead. The mine at which Gronow worked was temporarily closed down ; but that was not what troubled them most : they were discussing the sad necessity of flight.

Alice's flight, that is. Gronow was anxious to place her in safety ; for himself, he intended to remain.

It was Alice who urged delay.

'War may even yet be averted,' she said.

'It will not be averted,' Gronow replied, 'because the Transvaal Government is determined on war. It is not we who are determined, it is they.'

'If we could wait a little,' she continued, 'until after— Oh, Gronow, how can I leave you now ?'

Alice had touched on the real cause of their anxiety.

She was shortly expecting the birth of her second child.

'My darling wife,' said Gronow, with an emotion he rarely showed, 'do you think I *want* to send you away from me ? Do you think it isn't hard ? But I must provide for your safety. If we wait until too late—and when I think of what may be before us ——'

'If you could come too, dear——' they both spoke in broken, unfinished sentences, as their hurrying thoughts impelled them.

'And idle about in security, while my countrymen are fighting for their liberties. Would you like me to do that ?'

'No, I suppose not,' but Alice sighed heavily. 'Don't you wish sometimes that we had never come to this country?'

'No,' he replied, 'I have never wished that. This is a grand country, Alice. Look at the scope for work in it. The roads that are wanted, the railways, the bridges, the irrigation works—why, there is work for a century for a score of giants. And it will be done yet. We have a time of trouble before us—of more trouble, perhaps, than anyone knows; but afterwards we shall reap.'

Alice could not share his confidence just then. She was out of health, and depressed in spirits. Everything looked black and gloomy to her, and her usual even cheerfulness had failed her.

After a short silence, she said :

'You never told me you were in Court this morning, Gronow. What was it about?'

'Oh, the usual folly I did not think worth mentioning. How did you know it?'

'Young Warren passed and stopped to talk a little while, and he told me, thinking, of course, that I knew it.'

'Well, it was only this. One of those miserable policemen was ill-treating a Kaffir in the street. The Kaffir may have committed some offence, I don't know if he had or not; but, anyway, the policeman was kicking him about in the most barbarous manner. Lots of fellows passing by took no notice, some of them laughed. I interfered and put a stop to it. The policeman summoned me, and I had to pay a fine—not a large one.'

'What a shame!' murmured Alice; 'there is no redress for injustice in this country.'

'There will be redress,' replied Gronow, and his eye gleamed.

Alice leaned her head on his shoulder.

'I know you think me very weak and cowardly,' she said; 'I will try to be strong, Gronow.'

'I don't think anything of the kind,' he answered, stroking her hair; 'don't I know that it is ever so much harder on you than on me? It is you that have all the suffering. I have the solace of action.'

'I should not mind if it were only myself,' said Alice, her thoughts reverting to that other life which would hang in the balance, which would depend so entirely on her courage and endurance. Her husband divined her thoughts ; he was really consumed by an anxiety which he would not fully show to her. He put his arm about her, and kissed her very tenderly ; but there was silence between them ; it was the silence of that perfect sympathy that needs no words.

After a while Alice said cheerfully :

'What a comfort it is that Nora is safe and out of all this ! How it would add to our anxiety if she were here !'

'Yes, it is a comfort,' Gronow agreed ; 'and that reminds me, speaking of Nora, I had another letter from poor old Abdy by the mail to-day.'

'What is he writing about now ?'

'Well, he writes more hopefully. It seems they have nabbed this fellow Perry, in the States somewhere, and as he has not spent all his illgotten gains, they hope to recover some of the money.'

'As far as Nora is concerned I have never regretted the loss of the fortune,' observed Alice ; 'I was more sorry for Mr. Abdy than for anyone else.'

'True ; but still it is a satisfaction to have a scoundrel brought to justice ; and the money would at all events be better spent if it returns to the proper owners.'

'Oh yes, of course ! I cannot imagine how a man can make away with such immense sums of money. Thirty thousand pounds !'

'Oh, there is no doubt he had been robbing the firm for years. I only wonder they did not find it out.'

'But he only had control of Miss Lanyon's money quite lately.'

'Yes, but he had already fooled away a good deal of it, and he bolted with the rest.'

'Well, I sincerely hope that Mr. Abdy will be the better for his capture,' said Alice ; 'he must be a fine old man. And he writes in such a simple, formal manner about an

affair that must have nearly broken his heart if he is the honourable man he appears to be.'

'He must be that,' said Gronow. He had taken Mr. Abdy's letter out of his pocket, and was glancing through it.

'He hopes we may eventually recover half the fortune,' he said presently.

'Even that will make Nora a rich woman,' observed Alice. 'Dear child, I must say she took the loss of the money splendidly. I don't think any girl can ever have cared less about being an heiress.'

'She is so simple-minded,' replied Gronow thoughtfully. After a pause he continued: 'I wonder what Lester will do in case of war! That place he is living at now is very near the border.'

'He will put himself in a place of safety, I should say,' replied Alice rather scornfully, 'if he has not already done so.'

'I am not so sure,' said her husband, 'I fancy that he has some fighting blood in him. He is a moral coward, I allow, but I hardly think he is a physical coward.'

'A little fighting and hardship would do him good, I should think,' remarked Alice.

'It does no man any harm,' returned Gronow, 'but Lester is not a young man, and might not stand much exposure and privation. He must be past fifty.'

'Yes, about fifty-two, I think,' said Alice; 'but that is only the prime of life for a man who has not abused himself. I think I will go in now, Gronow, I feel rather chilly.'

The next morning, with overpowering reluctance, Alice commenced her preparations for departure. She did not realise all that it cost Gronow to insist, as he did, that there should be no further delay. He showed his feelings so rarely that outsiders did not credit him with having any, and even his wife occasionally did him an injustice in that respect.

They had agreed that Alice should go to Capetown, where Nora could easily join her. Gronow could not go with her, as the double journey was too great an expense. He had to be careful of his money now, as he did not know

when he should earn any more, and he wanted Alice to take with her the most of what they had, as there would probably be great difficulty in sending her money later on.

'The trains are very full now,' he said to her, 'and you must not cumber yourself with much luggage.'

'But I may be going for a long time,' said Alice sadly, 'I must have necessaries with me.'

'You must take a change or two of clothes, of course,' observed Gronow, with serene masculine ignorance.

'Oh, Gronow! I must have more than that!'

'Well, dear, I am afraid you will find they won't allow you to take much. You must try and do with one box; and buy what you want more in Capetown.'

'I shall have to be very careful of the money,' said Alice, 'and it seems such a pity to buy things when I have plenty here.'

'It is a pity,' agreed Gronow, 'but necessity has no law except itself; and there will be worse pities than that, I fear, before we are through with this.'

Alice sighed, as she looked round the room. Her little home, of which she was so fond, and so proud, when and how would she see it again? Almost everything in it bore marks of their own handiwork, which gave them the extra value that such things acquire. Gronow had made a great deal of the furniture himself, Alice and Nora had done all the adorning and beautifying. There was little Gronow's cot, associated with such tender memories, which he had long outgrown, but which she had hoped soon to use again. That, however, must be left behind, together with his little chair, his toys, his perambulator, and many other things which she could hardly afford at present to replace.

Gronow followed her glance, and shared her regret.

'I will take care of the house as long as I am here, dear,' he said, 'and if I have to leave it, I will try and make provision for its safety and protection as far as possible. But we shall have to take our chance, like everyone else.'

'Oh, yes, I know,' replied Alice, 'it is no worse for us than for others. If war does come thousands of homes will be desolate.'

How desolate ! It was not the loss of furniture or money that she cared for. If her heart should be left desolate, no place in the world would ever be home to her again.

Little Gronow, who was now four years old, and growing very like his father, was excited at the prospect of a journey, and ran about from one room to another, asking all sorts of questions, and distracting his mother with his efforts to help her to pack. Great was his woe when he found that his toys must be left behind ; even the promise of soon seeing Auntie Nora failed to console him.

At last he set up such a dismal howl over his box of bricks, that Alice, already tired and worried, could not stand it any longer ; and Gronow coming in at that moment, she was obliged to appeal to him.

'Gronow, Sonnie is so naughty, please take him away till I have finished.'

It was seldom, indeed, that Alice made such a request as that. Sonnie roared lustily when his father picked him up in his strong arms and carried him into the next room.

He was soon quiet, however. When Gronow made up his mind to be firm with the child there was not much resistance. And yet Gronow never got angry, or spoke loud, or scolded.

Sonnie had tired himself out, and presently fell asleep with his head on his father's shoulder. Gronow sat patiently holding him, just as, many years ago, he used to hold little Noel and nurse him. For some reason that recollection suddenly came back to him now with unusual vividness. He recalled the pretty, dark-haired boy so distinctly, with his refined manners and attractive ways.

'I wonder what that boy has done for himself,' he thought ; 'he must be twenty years old by this time.'

And then, curiously enough, as one association brought back another, he suddenly seemed to see quite clearly Noel's last letter to him, long since destroyed, the big round letters, and the name at the end, 'Noel Lanyon.'

'Lanyon !' he exclaimed to himself. 'That is why the name was familiar to me. I could never remember where I had heard it before. But it is not at all likely to have been

the same person.' It would never have occurred to him either to associate with Noel the Mr. Johnson whom Nora had casually mentioned in her letters at Christmas time.

At this moment Alice entered the room.

'Gronow——' she began, 'oh, Sonnie is asleep, that's right. Put him down on the bed, he will not wake. Here is a telegram for you, answer prepaid.'

Gronow rose quietly, and laid the child down on the bed, without waking him. It had been in his mind to tell Alice what he had just remembered about the name of Lanyon, but the telegram put it out of his head. He opened it, and a perplexed expression came over his face.

'What is it, Gronow?' asked Alice anxiously. Then, as he hesitated a moment, she came to his side and said calmly:

'Please tell me, dear. If you don't I shall only imagine something worse than it is.'

'Oh, I don't know that it is bad, but it is puzzling,' replied her husband; 'it is from the Lady Principal of Nora's school. Nora seems to have—gone away.'

'Gone away!' repeated Alice blankly.

'Yes, secretly; and she wires to know if we can tell her where she is.'

'Oh, Gronow! Where *can* she be?' exclaimed Alice.

'I don't see where else she can be except on her way to us,' he replied deliberately; 'but if she went away by rail they ought easily to have traced her.'

'What shall you do, Gronow?'

'I will go to the station and make inquiries down the line. And I will suggest to Miss What's-her-name to do the same at her end, if she has not done so already.'

'Probably she has. Of course she would wire to us first.'

'Yes. Well, I will go at once. Don't fret yourself too much, dear. Nora must have taken it into her wilful head to come flying off to us—though why, I do not know. But I don't see that she can come to any harm.'

He spoke cheerfully, but felt more anxiety than he showed. The country was in a disturbed state, all sorts of people were on the road, the trains were crowded with refugees, and it was not very consoling to think of a young and striking-

looking girl like Nora travelling alone day and night. If she took the precaution to book a seat in a ladies' compartment she would probably be all right; but Nora was so thoughtless, it was quite likely that she would do nothing of the kind. It seemed strange that she could have got away from the school and disappeared so entirely, without anyone having the slightest idea where she was, and Gronow felt very much inclined to blame the teachers in charge. However, like a wise man, he withheld his blame until he knew more of the circumstances. It was evident, from the wording of the telegram, that the Lady Principal was anxious and distressed. Alice, of course, was desperately anxious, though she tried to keep herself calm. When Gronow returned, after a long absence, with a grave face, her heart sank within her.

'You have not heard of her!' she exclaimed.

'No,' he replied; 'if she is travelling by train, she cannot have booked a seat in her own name. And the trains are so crowded now that I cannot trace her by description. She must have passed unnoticed.'

Alice was too much dismayed for words.

'I think we must wait a little now,' Gronow continued, though he knew what a terribly trying waiting it would be, 'and see if we hear anything more; if within the next few hours we do not, I must communicate with the railway officials and the police all down the line.'

'Could she have gone to her father?' suggested Alice.

'I have wired to him,' answered Gronow, 'but have had no reply so far.'

Twenty-four hours of suspense, which Alice never forgot, passed before they heard any further news. Gronow made many inquiries, but with no result. On the Tuesday evening, after he had spent most of his time and a good deal of his money in communications with half the officials in the country, there came a telegram from Mr. Lester:

'Nora is with me. Shall I send her back to school, on to you, or keep her?'

'He had better keep her,' said Gronow, who was rather angry with Nora by this time. 'You pass Colesberg on your

way down. She can join you there, and go back with you to Capetown.'

'What can the child have had in her head?' said Alice, shedding tears in the intensity of her relief.

'Something very wrong apparently,' observed Gronow, as he wrote out his telegram to Mr. Lester :

'Keep Nora till you hear from us.'

## CHAPTER XXIV

'A woman, that is like a German clock,  
 Still a-repairing ; ever out of frame ;  
 And never going aright, being a watch,  
 But being watch'd, that it may still go right.'

GRONOW was right when he surmised that Nora was on her way to them. She had received not long before a letter from Alice, which was not written in Alice's usual cheerful strain. She was out of health and depressed, and spoke despondingly of the necessity for flight and the approaching separation from her husband, whom she would leave, perhaps, in peril of his life. Nora took fire at once. Alice was ill ; she would have to travel a long distance alone and in a very unfit condition, with the charge, moreover, of little Gronow ; she wanted Nora, no doubt, and Nora felt that she ought to be with her.

Thoughtful in many ways, Nora was strikingly thoughtless in others. Her whole anxiety was for Alice ; yet it never struck her that by rushing off alone she might cause a good deal more anxiety than she would relieve.

The difficulty was to get away. She knew perfectly well that the Principal would never allow her to go, would give her a lot of good advice, and make her remain quietly where she was until sent for to join Alice in Capetown. This was also Gronow's plan, but it did not suit Nora at all ; she determined to go without permission and without leaving a clue as to where she was gone, lest they should come after her and fetch her back. Fortune favoured her. One of her companions, an English girl, whom she knew and liked, spoke casually of a friend of hers who had been leaving on Sunday evening for Norvals Pont. She had booked her seat and taken her ticket beforehand, and then a sudden attack of illness prevented her from going.

Nora, with a flash of inspiration, determined to take this lady's place. She confided in the girl, who entered into the spirit of the thing and promised not to betray her, and who further procured the ticket for her, which her friend was glad to get rid of.

'The seat is booked for Mrs. Green,' Nora's schoolmate said to her.

'They will not know I am not Mrs. Green,' replied Nora. 'I shall not tell a lie about it. I shall just say, "Yes, all right," or something of that sort.'

'You don't look like Mrs. Anything,' laughed her friend. 'However, I suppose you will pass all right. But mind, this ticket is only as far as Norvals Pont.'

'I can get a fresh ticket there,' said Nora, 'and I don't suppose they will turn me out of the seat.'

'You must look out, though, because the trains are very full now.'

'The trains coming south are full of refugees, I know,' answered Nora; 'but the trains going north will not be full, I should think.'

'They are, though you would not think it. The whole country seems to be on the move. Oh, it is a lovely bit of excitement for you! I wish I were going too.'

Nora quite agreed that it was a lovely bit of excitement, and took a keen pleasure in making all her arrangements secretly.

She packed only a handbag with immediate necessaries, made an excuse not to go to church on Sunday evening, and slipped away to the railway station while the rest were out.

It was a proof of her childish thoughtlessness that it never occurred to her that the Principal would telegraph to Gronow.

She would not for worlds have caused Alice any anxiety, and though her conscience pricked her for the anxiety she would cause her teachers, she soothed it by the reflection that she would wire to them as soon as she was safe from pursuit.

'I might wire from Norvals Pont,' she reflected, 'they would not come after me as far as that.'

She got Mrs. Green's seat without any difficulty, and found with surprise that, as her friend had said, the train was very full. Everyone seemed to be on the move, and the whole country in a state of ferment. No one, however, was going as far as Johannesburg ; the other three ladies in her compartment, who were all Dutch, were getting out at De Aar ; and Nora reflected that after passing the border there would probably not be such a crowd.

The first part of her journey passed without mishap.

She scarcely spoke to her companions, for she was afraid of betraying that she was not Mrs. Green, perhaps with direful results. During the night she was able to sleep but little, but her thoughts were busy—now with the dear sister whom she had not seen for more than a year, now with the friends she had left behind her, whose consternation, it is to be feared, gave her fancy more delight than uneasiness.

Monday was long and dreary, and Nora began to get very impatient, especially when she reflected that her journey was not half over. She bought a book at one of the stations and tried to while away the time between that and the conversation of her companions, which was almost entirely on religious subjects. They had a spirit lamp with them, and made coffee about five o'clock in the morning, of which they offered Nora a cup ; and Nora, weary and frouzy, after an uncomfortable night in the train, felt very grateful to them.

It grew dark rather early, and Nora fell into a doze, from which she was half roused about midnight at De Aar, where her companions got out. The train stayed there a long time, and after a while two other ladies got in with her, whom she scarcely noticed. When the train went on again she fell into a sound sleep, from which she woke, just at daylight, to find that the next station would be Norvals Pont.

The two ladies who got in at De Aar were English, and they began to talk to her. When they heard that she was going to Johannesburg they looked a little surprised, and one of them said gravely :

' That is not a nice journey for you to be taking alone, now ; the Dutch are very rude to English ladies at some of

the stations, and it is hardly possible to get out for refreshments, or anything of that kind.'

'Isn't it?' exclaimed Nora, rather dismayed, for she had not been able to bring away provision for the journey when she started; 'then,' she added, after a moment's reflection, 'I had better buy enough at Norvals Pont to last me the rest of the way.'

'I wonder your friends have allowed you to travel alone,' observed the other lady.

'It was not their fault,' began Nora hastily, and then stopped short, feeling that she could not explain. For the first time it began to dawn upon her that she had been reprehensibly rash in undertaking this expedition, and her confident spirit failed her a little. Her companions were too ladylike to ask any impertinent questions, but Nora fancied that they regarded her with disapproval.

At Norvals Pont she got out to take a fresh ticket. The station was crowded, and there was a long tail of people at the ticket-office. Nora was patiently waiting her turn, when someone touched her on the shoulder, and looking round she saw one of her travelling companions.

'You had better come and secure your seat,' she said, 'the compartment is filling up, and the inspector declares that your seat was only booked as far as this. We have been trying to keep it for you.'

Nora thanked her, and hurried back to the train.

'This seat was booked for Mrs. Green as far as Norvals Pont,' said the inspector, looking at her rather doubtfully, 'and another lady has booked it from here.'

'I had to change my plans afterwards, and go on to Johannesburg,' explained Nora helplessly.

'Then you should have booked the seat to Johannesburg,' returned the inspector, not uncivilly, but evidently in a difficulty.

'It was too late,' murmured Nora; 'isn't there another seat?'

'The train is very full,' replied the inspector; 'I am afraid there is not another seat in a ladies' compartment, but I will try and find one for you somewhere else.'

'Could you not wait for the next train?' suggested one of the English ladies.

'Till to-morrow? Oh no, I could not do that,' said Nora, beginning to be really distressed.

The inspector had moved away, and Nora was about to follow him forlornly, when suddenly a voice that seemed familiar said, in an astonished tone, just behind her:

'Miss Lester!'

Nora turned round sharply.

'Mr. Johnson!' she exclaimed, also surprised, but there was a note of relief in her voice that did not escape Noel.

'Are you in any difficulty? Can I assist you?' he asked courteously.

Nora explained.

'I want to go to my sister in Johannesburg. She is ill. By mistake my seat was only booked as far as this. Someone else has taken it here, and the train is full.'

'But are you going to Johannesburg *alone*?' asked Noel; 'are not your friends coming to meet you?'

'I did not know there would be any unpleasantness in travelling,' said Nora dismally.

'But they must know. They will be sure to meet you somewhere.'

'No,' replied Nora, with a great effort; 'they do not know I am coming. I started without telling them.'

Her manner was intensely constrained. She hated making a confessor of this young Mr. Johnson.

'Your friends in Capetown ought not to have allowed it,' observed Noel.

'I did not tell them either,' jerked out Nora, painfully conscious of Mr. Johnson's astonishment.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Then Noel said earnestly:

'Miss Lester, you *cannot* go on to Johannesburg alone; you might be insulted, you might be stopped—anything might happen. If your friends are not expecting you, they will not be anxious. It is not far from here to Mr. Mayer's farm, where your father is. I have a cart and horses here, and I will drive you straight there.'

'I thought it was a long way from here!' exclaimed Nora.

'No, it is about three hours' drive, perhaps a little more. We are not far from Colesberg, you know.'

At this moment the inspector came back again. Noel turned to him and said quietly:

'This lady will not go on by this train. Her friends are here!'

'All right, sir,' and the inspector hurried away, evidently glad to get out of a difficulty.

Noel took Nora's handbag from her, and they walked along the platform together. Just then a long train from the north came slowly in.

'Refugees,' observed Noel briefly.

Nora stood still and looked with wide-open eyes.

First came a long row of carriages, crammed to the windows, passengers both sitting and standing. Behind was a row of open trucks, in which weary men, white-faced women, and wailing children, were packed like cattle, standing as close as the space would permit.

'Oh, Mr. Johnson! Is that how they have to travel?' cried Nora.

Her thought was, 'Is that how Alice will have to travel?' and tears sprang to her eyes at the bare idea of it. Then she suddenly thought, perhaps Alice was in this very train, and she began scanning the passengers with eager eyes.

'Do you mind waiting a few minutes, Miss Lester?' asked Noel; 'perhaps I can help to get some of these poor women a cup of tea or something.'

'Oh, I will help too!' exclaimed Nora eagerly, and help she did, right willingly, as long as the train was in the station, undeterred by the struggling crowd and the screaming children. She observed and admired Noel's ready helpfulness, his patience and good humour, his compassionate gentleness with the children, whom he lifted and carried, and satisfied their little souls with drinks of water and cookies.

When the train was gone, however, and the bustle and excitement were all over, and Nora found herself outside the

station where Noel's cart was ready inspanned, all her stiffness returned.

'How came you to be here, Mr. Johnson?' she asked.

'I came on business for Mr. Botha,' he replied.

'But is it not quite out of your way to go to Limoen Kop?' she pursued, as she took her seat beside him and they started off.

'It is a long way round,' Noel admitted, smiling, 'but I have finished my business, and when I explain to Mr. Botha what has delayed me, he will not mind at all.'

'Won't it be too much for the horses?'

'Oh, no, the horses are all right!'

'It is very kind of you,' said Nora stiffly.

Noel felt crushed for a moment; then he turned suddenly to her with his irresistible smile:

'Why did you not say, "It is very impertinent of you"?' he asked, in a laughing voice; 'your tone said it, though your words did not.'

Nora looked into his mischievous eyes and her dignity gave way. She laughed outright, and he joined her.

'I believe I have been very foolish,' she owned frankly; 'and what will those ladies think of me?'

'What ladies?' asked Noel.

'There were two English ladies who got in at De Aar, and they looked askance at me already because I was travelling alone. And then came the fuss about the seat—and, to crown all, you called me Miss Lester, and they will know I am not Mrs. Green.'

'Not Mrs. Green?' inquired Noel, puzzled.

Whereupon Nora began from the beginning, and told him the whole story. Noel chuckled over it considerably.

'And after telling those people I must go on to Johannesburg,' wound up Nora.

'You suddenly rush off in an opposite direction with a strange young man,' observed Noel. 'I expect they will think you a rather original young lady.'

'It sounds simply horrid as you put it,' said Nora, and then they both laughed again.

After they had driven some distance Noel suddenly remarked:

'Hasn't it occurred to you, Miss Lester, that the head teacher at your school will probably have telegraphed to your sister to know if you are gone there?'

'Do you think so?' exclaimed Nora, with a start of dismay. 'Oh, how anxious Alice will be! It will make her ill. How thoughtless I am! Mr. Johnson, what can I do?'

Noel was keenly touched by her distress.

'I am sorry I did not think of it when we were in the station,' he said; 'I ought to have done so, but I suppose the refugees put it out of my head. But I will wire to them on my way back this afternoon. I shall pass Colesberg station.'

'Thank you very much,' said Nora; 'really I don't know what I should have done without your opportune help.'

'We seem fated to encounter in railway stations,' observed Noel, smiling rather oddly.

'In railway stations?' said Nora, surprised. 'I did not know I had ever met you in a railway station before.'

'No, I saw that you did not recognise me when we met again,' replied Noel, 'but I recognised you at once.'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Nora.

'You were once hunting for a Capetown carriage in Colesberg station at night,' began Noel.

'Was that *you*?' interrupted Nora; 'yes, of course it was! I wonder I did not know you again, for I do not often forget a face. But it was dark that night.'

'And I was uncommonly shabby,' added Noel. 'You see, I had just come off my five-hundred-mile tramp.'

'You had a good excuse for being shabby,' said Nora seriously, and they were both silent awhile.

It was a lovely spring morning, neither hot nor cold. A light rain had fallen, and the veldt was carpeted with small, bright flowers, all turning their cheerful little faces to the sun.

Noel was conscious of enjoying his drive immensely, and wishing it were six hours instead of three.

Suddenly Nora broke silence by saying:

'Mr. Johnson, you mentioned once that you knew a Mr. Abdy, a lawyer, in England.'

'Yes, so I do,' replied Noel, his heart beginning to beat a little more quickly. What else was she going to ask him?

'Do you ever hear from him?' Nora continued.

'I have not heard for some months,' Noel answered. 'Why do you ask? Do you know him too?'

'Yes, at least I know about him. Did you hear that he had a great misfortune?'

'Yes, I heard that his partner bolted with a lot of money, and almost ruined the firm. I was awfully sorry for poor old Abdy.'

'Yes. Well, they have caught his partner in America, and they have got, or will get, some of the money back.'

'Indeed! That is a good thing,' observed Noel gravely.

'I thought you might not have heard that, and would be glad to know it, if Mr. Abdy is your friend,' explained Nora.

'I am very glad to know it,' replied Noel heartily, 'and it was good of you to think of telling me.'

Nora looked pleased.

'I will tell you how I came to know about him,' she said confidentially. 'You see, there was an old lady in England who left me some money, and Mr. Abdy and his partner were trustees for it till I came of age. Well, that money was all lost, at least we thought so, and Mr. Abdy was dreadfully distressed about it. I was much more sorry for him than I was about the money—for myself, I mean. But now he hopes that we shall get some of it back in time, perhaps even half.'

'I hope you will,' said Noel earnestly; 'it was awfully rough on you, losing it like that. Perhaps you will recover the whole of it in time.'

Nora shook her head.

'I don't think that,' she replied; 'you see, it was—it was rather a lot of money, and we could not expect to get it all back. They will have to repay money to other people besides me. And we can't get any at present. The partner has to be tried, and all this lawyers' business seems to take such a long time.'

'So it does,' agreed Noel. He was thinking how glad he was that he had not revealed his identity to Nora, and wondering if the day would ever come when he would do so.

'What a child she was!' he said to himself, as he glanced round at her from time to time; and yet, how much character she possessed! Decidedly, Hester was very insipid after Nora.

When Nora presented herself, rather shamefacedly, to her father, he took it as quietly as he took everything else. He listened to her story with evident amusement, and when she had concluded, he remarked:

'I must say, Nora, you are a most original girl. I believe I shall be proud of you yet.'

'There is nothing to be proud of this time,' said Nora dejectedly, 'I have just made a fool of myself, that is all.'

'In that case, my dear child,' returned her father, 'you have only done what all of us pass the greater part of our lives in doing; so you cannot claim to have achieved any distinction in that line.'

'If only that old Principal hasn't wired to Alice!' sighed Nora.

'I expect she has though,' observed Lester, 'and Alice will be in a great worry. We must let her know somehow.'

'I can send a wire for you as I go back this evening,' put in Noel.

'Thank you, Mr. Johnson. We are really very much indebted to you,' said Lester sincerely; 'there is no saying what mischief might have come to this madcap child of mine if it had not been for your thoughtful help. How came you to be so opportunely at Norvals Pont?'

'I was there on business for Mr. Botha,' replied Noel.

That was all he knew about it himself. Botha had been much laid up with rheumatism all the winter and he had several times asked Noel to take letters and parcels for him to various places in the neighbourhood. Noel often thought he could have sent them as well by post. He knew nothing of their contents; and if he guessed that Botha had good reasons for preferring to send them otherwise than through the post, he kept his guesses to himself, and asked no questions, conceiving that it was no business of his.

The Mayers hospitably pressed him to stay that night, and he would gladly have done so, but felt bound to go home. Beside that, he had to get to Colesberg station in time to send a wire. Mr. Lester wrote it out and gave it to him.

When he left, Nora gave him her hand with a grateful smile, and thanked him again for his kindness in a frank, cordial manner. Noel felt a strange stirring of his heart as he looked into those innocent blue eyes.

If she had been his cousin, now, and Mr. Lester his uncle—yet no, he thought on the whole he would rather have things as they were.

When he gave in the telegram at the office he observed the name on it : 'From Lester to Neilson.'

'How strange !' he ejaculated to himself, 'I seem to be always coming across the names that I know, in connection with one another. So Nora's sister is married to a Neilson. I wonder who he is ?'

## CHAPTER XXV

'A long, lonely journey, with sadness in the heart: away from the familiar to the strange: that is a hard and dreary thing even to the rich, the strong, the instructed: a hard thing, even when we are called by duty, not urged by dread.'

THE anxiety about Nora, coming on the heels of so many other anxieties, proved too much for Alice; she was laid up for some days, and her departure was postponed. She implored Gronow not to be too hard on Nora, and Gronow replied very quietly that she need not fear, he would not be too hard on her. All the same, he did not show Alice the letter he wrote, which was a severe one, though short. He knew perfectly well that Nora had acted with a good intention, and quite thoughtlessly; but he considered it time that Nora should begin to be thoughtful. At the end of his letter he said he would wire to her when Alice started, that she must meet her sister at Colesberg, and, if there was room in the train, go on with her.

'I will arrange for you not to return to school,' he concluded, 'Alice will want you with her.'

Nora received this letter in a proper spirit of penitence and humility. Its very brevity seemed to convey a reproach. When she learned that Alice was ill from anxiety on her account her distress was unbounded. In vain the Misses Mayer tried to console her.

'Your sister not anxious now,' said Miss Mayer.

'She soon get over it when she know you're all right,' added Miss Lydia.

'See her very soon now,' continued Miss Mayer.

'She better stop here awhile and rest,' suggested Miss Lydia.

'Yes, much better. Long journey to Capetown,' concluded Miss Mayer.

This sort of duet went on at intervals all day, and Nora was fretted by it, while sensible of the old ladies' kindness.

At last her father said to her, more energetically than was his wont :

' It's no good perpetually crying over spilt milk, Nora. Take your lesson to heart, and try to be more thoughtful in future, that is all you can do.'

Good advice did not come very well from Mr. Lester as a rule, but this remark did Nora good ; she remembered that she must brace herself for what lay before her, and that, as Alice was evidently depressed and low-spirited, it would be all the more incumbent on her to be cheerful.

Meanwhile Alice was up and about again, and the dreaded parting could be no longer delayed. The trains were every day more crowded, and it was with great difficulty that Gronow procured a seat for his wife, but he was determined to do so, and succeeded ultimately.

The train started in the morning, and they had to be early at the station, which was thronged from end to end. Alice had summoned up all her courage and strength not to break down at the last ; Gronow was more silent even than usual, and that was all.

There was a good deal of trouble in finding and taking possession of the seat he had secured, and Alice was already hot and weary with standing about and pushing through the crowd, while little Gronow was frightened and subdued. At last she was settled in her place, her box underneath the seat, the child leaning against her knee. Every other seat was occupied, and there were two men standing. Gronow stood on the platform, giving some last directions, and Alice sat with her eyes fixed on his face, wondering when and how she would see those dear features again. She did not ask herself if she would ever see them again at all : *that* thought must be crushed away out of sight, if she was to preserve any calmness or courage. Many beautiful and sympathetic words have been written about the sadness of parting ; but words, after all, can only skim over the surface ; no words that man has ever devised can reach the real pain, the deep-lying anguish, that finds its only expres-

sion in a simple ‘Good-bye,’ a momentary meeting of troubled eyes, and hands that maybe will never touch again. At length the train moved slowly out of the station ; and if heavy hearts could be reckoned in pounds avoirdupois it would have been a heavy train indeed. Alice found the best antidote to her own suffering in sympathising with that of her neighbours, and was soon chiding herself for selfishness, when she discovered how many were even worse off than herself.

At the last moment another young woman with a little baby was put into the carriage, and, as there were no more seats, she had to stand. She looked very white and weary, and Alice presently learned that the baby was sick, and the mother had been up with it for two or three nights. After they had gone some distance she looked quite faint, and Alice said to her :

‘Take my seat now and let me stand. Please do ! ’

‘No, no,’ replied the young mother in a low voice, ‘I am more fit to stand than you.’

‘But you have to hold that heavy child. I will not stand all the way. We will take turns.’

With some difficulty they effected the exchange, and the poor young mother presently fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. The baby, which had been wailing incessantly in a feeble voice, became quiet, except for a painful little catch in its breath. Little Gronow had also fallen asleep, and lay on the floor at his mother’s feet.

The carriage was hot and stuffy, and everyone was consumed with thirst. After a long while they stopped at a station, and one or two of the men wanted to get out to try and procure something to drink, if only some water. There was a crowd of Dutchmen on the platform, however, who began jeering at and abusing the refugees, addressing all sorts of insulting remarks to them, and forcibly preventing them from obtaining any food or water. One or two of the women began to cry.

‘It will be better when we get across the border,’ said one of the men consolingly.

The young mother woke up with all the noise.

'Oh, I have been asleep, and you are quite worn out with standing!' she said to Alice; 'I am so sorry, do sit down now!'

Alice assured her it was all right; but she was in truth very weary, and gladly sank into her seat again. Little Gronow woke up and cried, and she had to take him on her lap.

Thus in hunger and thirst, in discomfort, pain, and weariness, that terrible journey continued. Alice and the young mother changed places from time to time. The baby lay quiet now, like a stone. The night seemed endless. They were too much cramped for much possibility of sleep. Never was dawn of morning more gladly hailed.

'Baby seems to get heavier and heavier,' complained the young mother.

'I wonder if I can get some milk for him at the next station. His poor little hands are quite cold.'

Alice bent down to look at the baby, and a sharp pang shot through her. It was dead. Quietly in the early dawn it had sighed its little soul away.

Alice did not know what to say. She looked at the other women in the carriage, and they understood from her face what had happened, and shook their heads; but they could not help.

'What is it? Why do you look like that?' the young mother suddenly asked sharply.

'Hush, my poor girl!' whispered Alice soothingly, 'your baby is out of his pain.'

'Dead!' cried the young thing, and she began screaming and sobbing. She was weak and overwrought, and became quite hysterical.

The other passengers were very kind and did what they could for her, which was little enough. After a while she sat quiet, holding her dead baby, while the tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. Alice thought no sight could possibly be sadder.

'I am happy in comparison with her,' she thought. 'Oh, I have been very selfish lately!'

If she had been, she was cured of it very quickly. Not

a thought of herself ever seemed once to come to her during the remainder of those trying days and nights. Every little act of kindness she could do, every word of sympathy she could speak, she constantly observed. With unfailing patience she soothed and cheered her own little weary, fretful boy, and tried to keep him from being troublesome to the other passengers.

And then, at length, came Colesberg, and with a great throb of joy Alice recognised the fresh, bright face, the eager blue eyes, the flying halo of gold.

‘Dear Nora !’

‘Alice ! Oh, how tired you look ! Do get out ; I have already bespoken some coffee for you, because I knew there would be a rush.’

Mr. Lester and Mr. Mayer were both there, too. The former greeted Alice with a genuine kindness and sympathy that went straight to her heart, and she was scarcely less touched by Mr. Mayer’s pressing hospitality. Mrs. Neilson must really stay with them a day or two, he said, and rest before going on. Alice was anxious to be at her journey’s end, but she was so very tired that she gladly accepted Mr. Mayer’s offer.

‘But I wish I could do something for that poor woman,’ she said ; ‘the baby ought to be buried.’

‘What baby ?’ asked Mr. Mayer, and was much concerned when he heard the story. He went off, and was away some time. When he returned he said to Alice :

‘It’s all right, Mrs. Neilson. A friend of mine here will give a little piece of ground, and see to it all. The greatest difficulty I had was to persuade the poor young creature to give up the baby to me.’

‘Oh, how very good of you, Mr. Mayer !’ exclaimed Alice, ‘to take all that trouble for a stranger !’

‘There’s no such thing as a stranger in affliction,’ replied Mr. Mayer briefly.

Soon afterwards they were all driving out in a big double cart to Limoen Kop, where they received another warm welcome from the Misses Mayer. When they heard of all the hardships Alice had endured, and of her fellow traveller

with the dead baby, they could say nothing but ‘Oh my !’ and ‘Oh my !’ and all further words seemed to fail them.

‘And where are you going when you get to Capetown, Alice ?’ Mr. Lester asked her.

‘Some friends of ours who are already there have been so fortunate as to get a couple of rooms for us ; and there we must stay as long as our money holds out,’ she added with a smile.

‘Oh, that will be all right !’ said Lester. ‘Gronow will get a chance to send you some more, or the war will be over by that time, or Nora will get some money from England.’

‘The war isn’t begun yet,’ observed Nora.

‘But it will begin just now,’ replied her father.

‘Yes, I fear there is no doubt of that,’ sighed Alice.

‘You are getting no money from Abdy now, I suppose,’ Lester observed to Nora. He had not spoken to her on the subject before.

‘Oh no, not for a long time !’ she replied, ‘but there is still some left in the bank from what I had before.’

‘We shall do very well,’ said Alice ; ‘there are many worse off than we are.’

It was not till they were alone together at night, little Gronow being fast asleep in a bed made up on the floor, that Nora said to her sister :

‘Alice, have you forgiven me for my wicked thoughtlessness ?’

‘Oh, Nora, how can you talk like that ? If you knew how glad I was to see your dear old face here, and not have to go on to Capetown all alone !’

‘But Gronow is angry with me.’

‘Not now. He was sorry when he got your letter, and he sent you his best love, and said you were not to fret yourself.’

‘Dear old Gronow ! When shall we see him again, Alice ?’ said Nora, and then raged at her own thoughtlessness once more, as she saw the acute pain in her sister’s face.

‘Don’t look like that, Alice. Gronow is so strong and wise, he is sure to come out all right.’

'I hope so, dear. And Nora, have you written to your Principal, to explain your conduct, and apologise?'

'Yes, I have,' replied Nora, with a rueful face, 'but I have not had an answer yet. I am very grateful to Gronow for not sending me back there. I don't know how I could have stood it after this.'

'He would have sent you back though,' said Alice smiling, 'if it had not been for my needing you. And it would have been good discipline for you. Nora, you must learn to be thoughtful now.'

'I will, I will,' cried Nora penitently. 'I shall never forget this time, Alice, and I will try and grow up now.'

Poor Nora! She was likely enough to grow up, Alice thought, in the prospect of what might lie before them.

After two or three days of welcome rest and peace at Limoen Kop, Alice was quite set up, and ready to go on again. She was anxious to get settled, and it was evidently best to do so. Mr. Mayer, who had been over to the station purposely to engage seats for them, was ready to go again to drive them.

Mr. Lester took an affectionate leave of them both.

'Good-bye, my daughters,' he said cheerfully; 'I expect it will be a case of: "Oft shall sin and sorrow reign, Ere we three shall meet again."

'Won't you come to Capetown too, father?' Nora asked rather wistfully.

'I don't know what I shall do, my child,' Lester replied cautiously; 'but I will write to you. And I shall expect to hear from you, so don't forget.'

When they reached the station they had to wait a long time for the train, which was late. While they were waiting a young man came up and spoke to them, whom Mayer introduced to Alice as Mr. Johnson.

Alice thought the young man regarded her with rather uncalled for attention. She was not aware that it was the name Neilson which interested him.

'I wish I could ask her husband's Christian name,' thought Noel, 'but I can't very well do that.'

Through all his vicissitudes Noel had never parted with

his old silver watch, and the little leaden anchor was still attached to the chain.

'Are you here on business again to-day, Mr. Johnson?' Mayer asked, a little drily.

'On my own business this time,' replied Noel carelessly; 'and I had an idea you might be here, as I knew Miss Lester would be starting one of these days for Cape-town.'

He did not think it necessary to add that he had been three or four times to the station lately, on one pretext or another, in the hope of seeing Nora again.

When at last the train came in, a difficulty arose about the seats. Those that Mr. Mayer had engaged by some mistake were occupied. He went after the station-master to see what could be done, and Noel disappeared in another direction. When Mr. Mayer came back he said:

'The station-master seems half distracted; but I have told him he *must* find two seats for you. Three, if possible, for it is really too much for you to have that big boy on your laps all the time.'

'I seem fated to get into trouble with railway travelling,' observed Nora.

'And I am fated to help you out,' said Noel's merry voice, as he came up at that moment. 'It is all right, Mrs. Neilson; I have got two comfortable seats for you. Come quickly and take possession of them.'

'But how did you manage it?' asked Alice, as they hurried along the platform.

'Two fellows I know are going down to-day, and I got them to give up their seats to you. They are strong young men, and can hang on anywhere.'

'Oh, but you shouldn't have done that, Mr. Johnson!' exclaimed Alice.

'I think I should, decidedly,' returned Noel, smiling; 'besides, they were only too pleased to give you their seats when they heard of the difficulty.'

Afterwards, just as the train was starting, he came to them again, and said:

'All right. My two chums have turned into the guard's

van for the present. Good-bye, Mrs. Neilson; good-bye, Miss Lester. A safe journey to you.'

'Who is that Mr. Johnson, Nora?' asked Alice, a little while later.

'I don't know who he is,' replied Nora. 'He lives at a Dutch farm the other side of Colesberg, with some people named Botha.'

'But why did he say he was fated to help you?'

'Well, that is rather curious,' and therewith Nora related the whole history of her acquaintance with Noel, concluding with:

'And fancy, he walked the whole way from Capetown to here.'

Alice was interested.

'He is a very handsome young fellow,' she remarked, 'and foreign-looking. But Johnson is quite an English name.'

'Father said very likely his name was not Johnson at all,' said Nora.

'That is quite possible,' agreed Alice. She knew several men in the Transvaal who went by an *alias*.

Two days later Alice and Nora took possession of their two little rooms with thankful hearts. The rooms were bare and unhomelike, but at least they had them to themselves; and whatever might be in store for them, their immediate troubles were ended.

## CHAPTER XXVI

A woman and not trusted, doubtless I  
 Might feel some sudden turn of anger born  
 Of your misfaith ; and your fine epithet  
 Is accurate too, for this full love of mine  
 Without the full heart back may merit well  
 Your term of overstrain'd.'

As he drove back from the station Noel felt thoroughly dissatisfied. There was something in those two sisters that was so different from his cousin Hester, with all her good qualities, which he fully acknowledged. It was just the extra touch of refinement to which he had been used all his life, and which he missed in his new-found relations. Sometimes he was guilty of wishing that they were not his relations, or that he had not found them.

Moreover, he was not easy in his mind about Hester.

During all these months he had been trying to make up his mind that it would be a good thing for him to marry Hester. It did not seem likely now that he would ever be rich again. Even if Nora should recover some of her fortune, he felt an invincible objection to ask her for the half of it ; and it was plain to him that he would never make a fortune at farming.

But lately another element had entered into his indecision. He had begun to have an idea that Hester was fond of him, not merely as a cousin ; she showed a certain shyness and reserve with him, which she had never done before ; and yet she was more tenderly attentive than ever to all his little wants and preferences.

Noel was not especially vain ; but he knew that he was handsome and attractive, and he was rather guiltily conscious of having treated Hester with a good deal of affectionate familiarity, which she might have misinterpreted. If it should really be the case that Hester loved him, he would

feel almost bound to marry her. He could only find that out by asking her, and if he once asked her—well, that was the final step from which he always shrank.

He was still in this state of indecision when war was declared. Noel was genuinely surprised.

'*You have declared war!*' he exclaimed, when Botha announced the fact to him with unconcealed exultation. 'But is not that a false step ?'

'On the contrary, it is a very wise step. Why do you think it a mistake ?'

'Because you put yourselves in the wrong,' argued Noel. 'If the English had attacked you, and you had remained on the defensive, the whole civilised world would have taken your part. But now, by declaring war yourselves, and invading British territory, and stirring up British subjects to rebellion, it appears to me that you seriously injure your own cause.'

'I will soon show you that you are wrong,' Botha replied quietly. 'In the first place, you allow that this war has been forced upon us by England ?'

'Yes, I suppose that is the case,' Noel admitted.

'Undoubtedly it is. When the Transvaal was perforce returned to us after our victories in the last war there was a certain section of the English people who made a great outcry at the time, and have felt sore about it ever since. That section is now in power, and they are determined to re-annex both the Transvaal and the Free State, by foul means, since fair are not available. Rebellion is fully justified in such a case. We, who are certainly British subjects at present, are yet justified in aiding our brethren against such tyranny and injustice. Since war is inevitable, to anticipate the attack by a descent on the enemy's country is wise strategy.'

'It would be of course,' returned Noel, 'in the case of an equally powerful nation; but can it be wisdom on the part of two petty states to rush into conflict with a world-wide empire ?'

Botha turned to him with scorn in his blue eyes.

'Your world-wide empire is rotten to the core,' he said

vehemently ; ‘our resources are far greater, and those of England far less, than you imagine. We are prepared at every point for a prolonged struggle. The next few months will show you that I am right—wait and see, wait and see.’

After a pause, he continued more quietly :

‘Besides, we shall have a great part of Europe at our backs.’

‘If you do not alienate their sympathies,’ observed Noel.

‘On the contrary, the magnificent effort we shall make will excite their sympathies to the highest degree. And if they do see us being crushed by brute force they will come to our assistance.’

‘Are you sure of that ?’ asked Noel doubtfully ; ‘that would mean European war. They would not risk it for the Armenians, will they for you ?’

‘I tell you, Noel, we shall set the whole world by the ears before we have done,’ replied Botha grandly ; ‘I have certain information of which you do not know.’

Noel quite believed that his uncle might have certain information as regarded the resources of the Transvaal, but that his information should extend to the councils of the Courts of Europe seemed to him improbable. However, he admired the stern, courageous old man, and really sympathised, or thought he sympathised, with his cause.

Once the war began, Noel became interested and excited like everyone else ; still, he did not feel inclined to take an active part in it. For one thing, rebellion is an ugly word, and a still uglier fact. For another thing, his sympathies were not wholly engaged on the side he professed to espouse.

Nora and her sister were English.

One evening he was sitting on the stoep with Hester, and they had been discussing the latest news. Presently Hester laid a timidly caressing hand on his arm, and said pleadingly :

‘Noel, you are heart and soul with us in this matter, are you not ?’

‘Yes, of course I am,’ he replied rather indifferently. ‘Why do you ask ?’

' You would not fail us if we wanted you to help us at any time ? '

' I would never betray you, if that is what you mean,' said Noel ; ' but for anything else—well, I don't know if I am a coward, but I don't seem to be very keen on fighting, somehow.'

' Fighting ! Oh no ! ' exclaimed Hester, and her hand tightened on his arm a little, ' Father would never ask you—at least, I hope not—to fight.'

' You would not like me to go to the front ? ' asked Noel, smiling at her.

Hester averted her eyes.

' You would not mind helping in other ways ? ' she murmured.

' What sort of ways ? ' demanded Noel.

' Despatch riding, for instance.'

' N—no, I suppose not,' he replied doubtfully ; ' to tell you the honest truth, Hester, I had rather not be mixed up in it at all.'

' Why not ? ' she asked rather sharply, and gave him a keen glance ; ' because you are not really whole-heartedly with us ? '

' Not that, but I hate to be mixed up in rows or quarrels of any kind,' replied Noel rather feebly.

' Oh well, of course, if you do not really care—why then, we cannot trust you,' said Hester, with an air of deep disappointment, and the tears started to her eyes.

What could Noel say or do ? He put his arm round her and kissed her.

' My dear little cousin,' he said affectionately, ' you know that I would never deceive you, and never, intentionally, give you a moment's distress. Why should you say you cannot trust me ? '

' You as good as said you would not come to our aid in a difficulty if we wanted you,' she replied, withdrawing herself petulantly from his arm.

' No, no, I did not say that. If I saw you in trouble, my dear cousin, I would go to the world's end for you. If this house were attacked by English soldiers I would defend

you with my life, if necessary. All I said was, that I did not wish deliberately to thrust myself into the war; I had rather stand and look on.'

'I wonder if you would really defend me?' Hester said archly, looking up into his face.

'If the time ever comes, you will see,' he replied readily, 'though for your sake I hope it will not come.'

She allowed him to kiss her again, and assured him, in answer to his query, that she was not vexed with him; but she went away to her father, and said:

'He is an English coward. We cannot trust him.'

'I do not think he is a coward,' Botha answered reflectively, 'it is that English girl that came here once. He is soft about her, and he does not like openly to go against her people.'

'Miss Lester!' said Hester, with a note of contempt; 'well, whatever the cause, we cannot trust him.'

'I will make use of him all the same,' asserted Botha; 'he must see that he is irrevocably bound to us, and the fact of his near relationship gives us a great hold upon him. The other side would *never* trust him under any circumstances, and he must know that as well as we do.'

'Yes; but he is weak and vacillating. If you employ him he might get you into trouble.'

'Not if he finds himself fairly caught. He *dare* not get me into trouble. If he has once committed himself to some decided action he will be obliged to go on. He may get himself into trouble, but I will take good care that it does not concern me.'

'I don't see how you will do it; but I know you are very clever, father,' said Hester, with genuine admiration.

'Are you fond of Noel?' asked her father abruptly.

'Yes, I am fond of him,' replied Hester frankly; 'one cannot help it, he is so very attractive.'

'But you do not wish to marry him?'

'How could I, father, even if I did wish it? But I do not'

'I have sometimes expected him to ask for your hand' observed her father thoughtfully; 'but he has not placed us in that dilemma, fortunately.'

'There would be no dilemma,' replied Hester rather haughtily. 'I should refuse him, that would be all.'

'I believe he is fond of the English girl,' remarked Botha, as he rose and walked away.

'I don't know what he can see in her,' muttered Hester with a rather inconsistent pout, as she went off in an opposite direction. She did not want to marry Noel, perhaps, but yet she liked to come first with him—a not uncommon weakness in girl-nature.

It was a few days later than this that Botha said casually to Noel :

'I suppose there is no longer any reason to conceal your relationship to us from our friends and neighbours ?'

'Only the same reason that there has always been,' replied Noel, 'that it is not an absolute certainty.'

'Oh, well, it is a moral certainty,' returned Botha ; 'and, after all, we all behave as if it were an absolute certainty.'

'That is true. Still, I do not quite like the idea of calling myself Dupleix,' said Noel, with some hesitation.

'Why not? If there are any relations still living in England they are not likely to hear of you. And then, some day you might go home and turn some of them up. If the rich aunt is still living, she might be inclined to do something for you. Who knows ?'

'I am not at all likely to do that,' said Noel shortly.

'There is another thing,' continued Botha, looking steadily at the young man ; 'you treat Hester, very naturally, with much more familiarity than you would if she were no relation to you. I am not making any objection to that,' he added, as he noticed the flush rise to Noel's cheek, 'because I feel thoroughly satisfied that you are my sister's son, and, as such, I look upon you almost as Hester's brother. But outsiders may also notice—in one or two instances I know that they have noticed—this familiarity. And in that case, as you will see yourself, it is due to Hester that it should be explained.'

'Certainly,' responded Noel, quickly and decidedly ; 'in that case, as you say, it should be made known at once. Pray do so.'

Botha regarded him attentively.

'If,' he observed presently, 'you would really prefer to retain, for the present, the name of Johnson, I see no reason why you should not do so. It is so many years since my sister went away that there is no one left about here who remembers her marriage. If I say that she married an Englishman, that is enough; you can still be Noel Johnson.'

'Thank you,' replied Noel. 'I think that, for some things, it would be better for the present.'

Botha had not the clue, of course, to Noel's objection to call himself Dupleix. Noel did not wish Lester, and through Lester, Nora, to know who he was, unless he chose to reveal his identity to them; but Botha could have no idea of this. He said no more about it, however, but, changing the subject, he asked, with a certain seriousness of manner:

'Noel, if any harm should come to me at any time, you would act the part of a brother to Hester, would you not? There is no one else to do so.'

'Indeed I would,' returned the young man heartily; 'you may rely upon me for that. No harm shall ever come to Hester that I can prevent.'

'It is a great relief to me to think that,' said Botha. 'Hester's solitary position has always been an anxiety to me. I have other relations, but they do not live in this part of the country.'

Noel was just about to say, 'Hester will get married some day,' when it occurred to him that perhaps Botha was thinking that he, Noel, would marry Hester in the end. There was also that uncomfortable suspicion that Hester herself was growing fond of him—a suspicion for which he certainly had some grounds.

Altogether, Noel was not in a comfortable frame of mind at this time. He felt sometimes as if an invisible net were being twined about him. He owed the Bothas so much, he was really grateful to them, really liked them, and there was no reasonable doubt that he was closely related to them. Yet this gratitude, this liking, this relationship, always came before him in the form of a kind of bondage,

not always unpleasant, but sometimes hampering, and even annoying.

And Nora, whom he would very probably never see again, was often present, a vivid image, to his mind. Hester's attractive charm, always near him, was associated with bondage—an easy, grateful bondage for the most part, but still a bondage. The image of Nora was associated with liberty.

## CHAPTER XXVII

‘Wilt thou make a trust a transgression? The transgression is in the stealer.’

As the war proceeded Noel found himself more and more troubled by the division of his sympathies. After all, he had been brought up an Englishman, and had imbibed the tradition of English school and college life. When he read of the desperate valour of English officers, of the willing endurance of the English soldier, of their many deeds of heroism, he could not help feeling a thrill and a glow; and often he caught himself thinking, ‘How Nora will rejoice in this; how proud she will be of that! ’

Moreover, Mr. Abdy sometimes sent him an English paper, taking it for granted that he was on the English side; so that he was not so much deceived by the false accounts of the Dutch victories and Dutch losses as were most of his neighbours.

On the other hand, he perceived that the Boers had been very much underrated; he still held that their cause was just, and he knew of many individual instances of heroism among them also. Besides this, he seemed to be suddenly drawn into closer and more intimate relations with his uncle. Botha talked to him more freely; treated him like his own son, and placed a great deal of confidence in him.

One day he said to him:

‘Noel, ever since you gave me your promise to care for Hester if I should be taken from her, a great weight has been lifted from my mind. I am an old man, and the events of these troublous times are a great strain upon me, greater than I expected. The struggle will be a prolonged one, and I sometimes think I shall not live to see the end of it. I place the same confidence in you as if you were my own son, and I feel the same affection for you.’

Noel was touched. Botha rarely showed any sign of emotion, and he had never spoken before about feeling old, or contemplating the end of his life as approaching. Hitherto he had been as full of fire and enthusiasm about the cause as a young man ; and Noel feared he must be ill when he talked in this way. However, he made a suitable response, never a difficult matter for Noel.

'As regards Hester you may trust me entirely,' he replied, 'but still, I hope there will be no need for her to look to me alone for many years to come. I quite understand that you are feeling the strain of this war, but yet, uncle, you appear to me as vigorous and energetic as ever.'

'It may be so,' Botha replied, smiling a little.

Noel went away, and said to himself :

'I will ask him for the right to protect Hester. It is the best thing to do. If I am not exactly in love with her, still, I am very fond of her, and I think she is fond of me. If we are married we shall be quite happy together, and I shall feel more settled. And I shall never marry—anyone else.'

And upon that Hester came to him, and said :

'Noel, do you think there is anything the matter with father ?'

'He seems depressed,' Noel answered, 'but that is only natural while the country is in this miserable state. I cannot see that there is anything the matter with his health.'

'I hope not,' said Hester earnestly. 'Noel, I cannot imagine myself without father.'

'You will have me, dear,' he replied kindly ; 'not that it will be the same thing of course.'

'Oh, it makes a great difference having you,' Hester rejoined quite eagerly. 'I used often to wish I had a brother, but now I never do,' she concluded, looking up at him with a really bewitching smile.

It was on the tip of Noel's tongue to ask her then and there to let him be something more than a brother ; but he did not say it, for he intended to broach the subject with her father first.

'You have other cousins, have you not ?' he asked.

'Yes, but I do not know them well. None of them live very near, and I have never felt intimate with them somehow.'

'Are any of them fighting now?'

'Oh yes, several of them; father hears of them sometimes. One is fighting on the other side.'

'How is that?'

'He married an Englishwoman, but he sympathised with us all the same. At first he was willing to help us, then he said he would be neutral, now he has gone over to the other side. I *despise* a man who does not know his own mind,' Hester ended energetically.

'It is a very hard case where families are divided,' observed Noel, but to himself he said:

'She is right. It is despicable not to know one's own mind. Mine shall be made up now, once for all.'

They were sitting together on the bench, and Hester was leaning on his shoulder, as a girl might lean against her lover.

Noel felt certain that she would accept him if he asked her to marry him, and he determined to speak to Botha about it that same evening.

Since the war began Noel had several times wished to ride over to Limoen Kop, and see how the Mayers were getting on; but when he suggested it, Botha objected so strongly that he felt bound to give up the idea.

'It is not that I have any personal feeling against Mayer,' said Botha; 'he is a man whom I respect highly. But it is impossible for me to keep up a friendly intercourse with him under present circumstances, and I think it is better not to make any pretence of it.'

Noel did not get an opportunity of speaking to his uncle that evening, for two or three Dutchmen arrived about supper time, and stayed until the next morning. Botha had a good deal of private conversation with them, and Noel, who had never seen any of them before, felt convinced that they were Free State or Transvaal scouts, and had come for information.

When introduced to Noel as Botha's nephew, they

treated him in a friendly manner, and evidently looked upon him as one of themselves. His relationship was a passport to their favour. After they had left the next morning, Botha called Noel, and told him he wanted to speak to him :

'I have never yet,' he said, 'asked you to do anything directly to help our cause. Now I am going to do so. But before I do I must have your assurance that you are really, from your heart, willing to do it.'

He looked at Noel very keenly, and Noel returned his gaze frankly. He resolved to speak plainly, and no one knew better than Noel how to speak plainly without giving offence.

'I will tell you the honest truth, uncle,' he said. 'I am heartily willing to serve you ; but it must be straightforward service, nothing underhanded. I tell you, that when I hear of such things as the treacherous use of the white flag, or the shooting of wounded men, I am disgusted and revolted. I was brought up with English ideas of honour, and I think they are right.'

'Where do you hear of these things?' asked Botha rather sternly—'from lying reports in English newspapers. But I am quite at one with you,' he went on more gently. 'I do not deny that there have been isolated acts of treachery on our side ; but then, so there have been on the other side. All Englishmen are not honourable. However, such acts of treachery are as abhorrent to me as they are to you. Trust me, Noel, I will never ask you to do anything that the most fastidious could call dishonourable.'

'Then I am your man,' replied Noel cheerfully.

'I will tell you what it is I want you to do,' Botha continued. 'A friend of mine, whom you have met here, Van der Byl of Driefontein, is in danger. He is really loyal ; that is to say, although he sympathises with us, he has never spoken a word, or done anything whatever to help us. He is a British subject, and he does not think, as I do, that rebellion is justifiable ; he has remained perfectly neutral ; nevertheless, he is suspect. The English troops, as you know, are close to Colesberg ; they will probably surround it, and

in doing so they must come on to his farm. I want to send him a warning, so that when they come he may have no suspicious persons on his place, and may make any preparations he may like to make for a search. If I go to him myself I shall do him more harm than good, because I am suspect too. You, who speak English like an Englishman, and call yourself by an English name, are safe yourself, and will bring him in no danger.'

'I will go,' said Noel; 'when shall I start?'

'To-night. It is moonlight, and will be much cooler than in the day. You can perform the journey more quickly. I will give you a letter to take to Van der Byl; but if you should run into any danger, destroy it. I leave that entirely to your own judgment. You know the roads?'

'Oh yes, I know the road, and remember the place well,' replied Noel; 'and now, uncle, if I return safely from this mission—'

'Well?' asked Botha.

'I shall have a great favour to ask you.'

'By all means, nephew, I shall be pleased to grant it.'

'Even to the half of your kingdom?' Noel asked, smiling.

'What is the meaning of that?' returned his uncle.

'Even if it is your daughter that I ask for?'

'Oh! is that it?' said Botha, dwelling on the 'Oh.' 'Well, Noel, you know that my affection will grant you anything, but I must know what Hester says herself; I would never force her inclination.'

'I should hope not,' replied Noel; 'it is my part to win it.'

'Then we will leave it at that till your return,' said Botha, holding out his hand, 'and whatever comes, remember you are as my own son, Noel.'

Noel arranged to start directly after supper. About two hours before sundown another young Dutchman rode up to the homestead, who was a stranger to Noel, but evidently a friend of the Bothas, who greeted him warmly. From what they said Noel gathered that they had not met for a long time. Hester seemed somewhat embarrassed when she introduced the two young men to each other, and afterwards

Noel thought her manner constrained. It also appeared to him that, after supper, both his uncle and Hester seemed rather anxious to get rid of him, and hurried his departure. The young fellow himself, however, whose name was Steynberg, was quite friendly and cordial.

Noel saddled his horse and made ready to start. Botha gave him a letter, addressed to Van der Byl, and said :

'Don't let that get you into any trouble now—swallow it rather.'

'All right, I will,' replied Noel laughing, and his spirits rose at the thought of a little excitement and adventure.

'Aren't you going to say good-bye to me, Hester?' he asked his cousin, who was standing at the door.

'Good-bye, and good success,' she answered, smiling, but not moving from where she stood.

Noel went up to her and kissed her.

'I am not going away like that,' he said lightly. 'Who knows if I shall come back?'

'You will come back, of course,' she answered, but he thought her manner cold; 'they will not do you any harm, the English, if they find you.'

Steynberg, who was also on the stoep, looked at him rather hard as he wished him good-night.

'What is the matter with them all this evening?' thought Noel as he rode away. 'Perhaps Botha has given some hint of what I said to Hester, and she does not like it.'

He tried to think that he would feel very much disappointed if Hester did not want to marry him, but he could not persuade himself that he was in any great suspense about it. At the same time he stuck to his purpose. It was as Botha had said—he was committed now to a decided course of action, and he could not turn back.

The road, on leaving the homestead, made an almost semi-circular curve, following the bank of a *sloet* that irrigated the ploughed lands, so that a person on foot, crossing the garden, and leaping the *sloet*, could strike the road at a point higher up.

Noel was riding quietly, enjoying the fresh night air and mellow moonlight, when suddenly a dark shadow was thrown

across the road in front of him, and a man stepped down from the bank of the *sloet*.

Noel reined up instinctively. When the moonlight fell on the man's face he recognised, to his surprise, Steynberg.

'Excuse me for hindering you, Mr. Johnson,' he said rather abruptly, 'I wish to ask you a question. I did not understand from Mr. Botha your position in his household. You appear to be on very familiar terms with Miss Botha.'

'What business is that of yours?' asked Noel angrily.

'Well,' said Steynberg quietly, 'I think you must allow that I have a right to ask. Miss Botha is betrothed to me.'

'Betrothed?' ejaculated Noel.

'Yes, for two years. I have been away in Johannesburg, but I am not aware that that has made any difference to our engagement. We have corresponded regularly, and now I have come down to make arrangements for our marriage. I should have come sooner, but I could not get away.'

During this little speech Noel had recovered himself to some extent.

'I shall not stand in your light, Mr. Steynberg,' he said, with cold civility. 'Mr. Botha is my uncle, and Miss Botha is therefore my cousin. I look upon her and treat her as a sister, that is all.'

'Your cousin!' exclaimed Steynberg, his manner changing, 'that alters the case entirely. Strange that they did not tell me! I beg your pardon sincerely, Mr. Johnson, and shall be proud to claim you as a relation.'

Noel acknowledged this courtesy distantly enough, wished him a brief good-night, and rode on quickly.

Steynberg went back to the house and said to Botha:

'Why did you not tell me that Mr. Johnson was your nephew? I might have quarrelled with him.'

'I thought you knew it,' replied Botha, staring at him.  
'What would you have quarrelled about?'

'About his familiarity to Hester.'

'I did tell you, Piet,' said Hester, who was looking very uncomfortable, 'I said, "my cousin," but you cannot have heard me.'

'I certainly did not hear you,' returned Steynberg; 'but it does not matter, as I have not quarrelled with him.'

Botha, however, was annoyed, and said to his daughter, when they were alone together:

'Why did you make this unnecessary mystery about Noel?'

'Father, I did not know what to do,' replied Hester distressed. 'Piet turned up so unexpectedly. If only Noel had been away first! I thought Piet would be so surprised to find we had a cousin living in the house so long, and I had never told him, and also that Noel should not know anything about our engagement. And it is only lately that I have been allowed to tell people that Noel is my cousin. I thought I would keep quiet till Noel was gone, and then find some way of explaining it all to Piet.'

'And as it happens,' continued Botha, 'Noel asked me for your hand this very morning.'

'Did he?' exclaimed Hester, laughing in spite of her annoyance. 'And what did you say to him?'

'I told him that it depended upon you.'

'So like a man,' said Hester mischievously, 'to shirk the responsibility on to a woman.'

'But in this case we agreed that it should be so,' rejoined her father.

'Yes, I know,' agreed Hester, 'but Noel will be angry with us now.'

'Yes, he will, but it does not matter now. Of course it was a risk not telling him of your engagement, but it was necessary for you to bind him to us by a great show of affection. It would have been better to have let Piet into the plot, if he would have consented to allow Noel to make love to you.'

'He would not,' replied Hester; 'Piet is very jealous.'

'Well, as I said before,' repeated Botha, 'it does not matter now, if Noel is angry with us. If this had happened sooner it might have alienated him from us; but now that he has undertaken this mission he has gone too far to turn back.'

'Suppose he should come back now, and refuse to do it?'

'He would have been back by this time if he had meant to do that.'

'But suppose he simply returns without performing it?'

'If he plays me a trick of that kind,' said Botha, with an ugly gleam in his eye, 'I will denounce him to the English as a spy. I have reserved that as a last resource if he should betray us. Do not fear, Hester; he is altogether in my power.'

'Still, I should be sorry if any harm came to Noel,' Hester concluded with a sigh.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

'To whom should I complain ? Did I tell this,  
Who would believe me ? O perilous mouths !  
That bear in them one and the self-same tongue,  
Either of condemnation or approof ! '

NOEL followed his road mechanically, unconscious of outward things, such was the tumult of his thoughts within.

Hester had been betrothed to that young Dutchman for two years—for a longer time, therefore, than she had known Noel, and her father must, of course, have been aware of the engagement, must have given his consent to it.

There had been some double-dealing, that was certain ; but with what object ? He recalled Hester's caressing ways, the looks, the smiles, the kisses she had granted him, even before she knew he was her cousin. Had it been all mere flirtation, or was there any other purpose behind ?

Whether there was or not, it was certain that Botha had deliberately deceived him, for he had undoubtedly given him to understand that he would not object to his suit for Hester, in fact, had so far encouraged him.

It was evident, moreover, that they had not expected Steynberg.

His arrival had been a surprise.

Turning all these things over in his mind, Noel grew not only more and more indignant, but more and more uneasy and suspicious. There must be something behind all this, some reason for treating him in this unworthy manner. They had been playing with him, making some use of him, and he did not know what. The idea was torment.

As he rode on, across the white spaces of moonlight, and the black shadows that intervened, the inexpressible calm and solemnity of the night gradually soothed and cleared his brain. The silent veldt was so vast, the silent heavens

were so much vaster ; they brought back to him some of the higher thoughts which used to visit him when he was tramping under the starry sky from Capetown to Colesberg. He recalled those nights, and wished himself back again—two years back. If only Fate had guided him to Mayer's farm then, instead of to Botha's, how different his lot might have been !

Then suddenly a thought flashed into his mind, which must have occurred to him sooner had he been less confused, and which made him rein up suddenly, and utter an exclamation aloud.

Botha had lied to him about one thing—probably, therefore, about many. All this story about Van der Byl was merely a blind. The letter contained, perhaps, some quite different information. Van der Byl was probably no more loyal than Botha himself, and Noel was the tool of both.

Should he go on, or turn back ? If an innocent man was really in danger he was willing to warn him ; but if it were nothing of the sort, as seemed only too likely ? And if he went back, what should he say to his uncle ? ' You have lied to me, and I do not trust you ; I will not do your dirty work.'

That was all very well, but Noel had an uncomfortable suspicion that he did not know himself the extent of the hold his uncle had upon him. It was only lately, for instance, that Botha had suddenly expressed a wish to let the world know that Noel was his nephew, making his familiarity with Hester the excuse ; and at the same time he had been willing that Noel should retain his English name of Johnson. Was there not something behind this too ? Was not Noel by this time known to every Dutchman in the neighbourhood, and to all their spies and secret agents, as a compatriot and a sympathiser ; and was he not already known to the representatives of the English Government as a probably disloyal subject—a rebel and a traitor ?

There was one way to set at rest some, at least, of these doubts, and that was to open the letter he carried, and possess himself of its contents. It was an action from

which he would have shrunk yesterday, as mean and dis honourable ; but Botha's duplicity had so enraged him, that counter-duplicity seemed not only excusable, but right.

Still, he could not quite make up his mind to it. He rode on slowly, turning it over and over in his mind.

When a man has a secret inclination to do a doubtful action, and, instead of putting away the thought of it at once, debates it for a long time, the most casual observer of human nature will not have much difficulty in conjecturing the result. But whatever the judgment passed on his conduct, this was what he did. He dismounted, led his horse into the black shadow of a thorn-bush, sat down on the ground, drew out the letter and read it, as he could well do, by the brilliant moonlight. The letter, which was addressed on the outside to Van der Byl, was addressed on the inside to quite a different person, one Bezuidenhout. It contained, first, a detailed description of Gerald Lester, employed in riding despatches for the British Government ; and secondly, an exact statement of where this Gerald Lester would be found at a certain hour on the following day, where he was going, where it would be best to lay an ambush for him, shoot him, and take possession of his papers, should he be carrying any.

Gerald Lester—that was Nora's father ! And Noel was riding to betray him to his death ! If anything was wanted to complete the measure of his self-contempt it was this.

He threw himself, face downward, on the ground, crushing the letter in his hand, and groaned aloud.

This was what had come of letting himself drift, month after month, never making up his mind, never giving any serious thought to his position, merely letting things slide, as if nothing were of any consequence. He could see it all plainly enough now. Of course he, half an Englishman, with English manners, and speaking English perfectly, having at the same time a very fair mastery of Dutch, knowing the country, and all the Dutch farmers in the neighbourhood—of course he was an ideal spy, the very man to carry despatches, to escape suspicion from both sides. How could he have been such a fool, he asked

himself bitterly, as not to have guessed long ago that Botha would use him for some such purpose, and would seize upon any opportunity of alienating him entirely from his English friends?

And this no doubt he had succeeded in doing. Supposing that now he went straight to the Mayers with this letter, and told them the whole story, would they believe him? It was most unlikely. In all probability Botha had contrived to have the information conveyed to them that Noel was his nephew, and of his party. They would either disbelieve him entirely, and regard him as an enemy, or they would distrust him as a vacillating coward, true to neither side.

Besides this, he did not know that the Mayers were still at Limoen Kop. He had never heard of them since the beginning of the war; and, like many other loyalists, they might very likely have taken refuge in Colesberg, or some other town.

One thing was certain, that Nora would never speak to him again—nay, he would never dare to look her in the face again. And he loved her, he told himself now, with a sort of fierce satisfaction in tearing open his wounds; he *loved* her as he had never loved Hester, as he had never loved any other woman, nor ever would. He loved her, and she would despise him; if, indeed, she ever heard or thought of him again.

Suddenly another thought struck him, which made him sit upright, with a strained, anxious look upon his face. Even if this letter were not delivered, was Lester safe?

Was there not other information out about him? A little reflection showed Noel that even if it were so, he could not help. He did not know where Lester was starting from, nor the road by which he was going. If he tried to find it from the directions in the letter, he would probably stumble into an ambush himself, perhaps he would even serve as a guide to the Boers to Lester's whereabouts.

And yet the thought of running any risk to warn Nora's father, perhaps to save his life, was very attractive; the attempt, whether successful or not, would restore him to

some measure of self-esteem. There was an extreme probability that Lester, if he found him, would not listen to him, would perhaps have him arrested as a spy; but that risk he disregarded; the only question was, was the attempt in the least worth while.

Perhaps not, except to a man who was desperate, and that man, just at this moment, was Noel. He might lose his life—that concerned him not at all; his reputation—that was lost already. As to his chance of winning Nora, he had never had one, so he could not lose it.

He decided not to destroy Botha's letter just yet, it would serve as a proof of his story, should he find Lester. And if he did not find him, what then? Should he return to Wolve Kop? Never. And yet where else could he go?

Where else in the wide world had he a friend, an object, a home, the bare means of living? There seemed no place for him anywhere, not even in the ranks of battle, for neither side would trust him now.

Such reflections as these, however, would only weaken his immediate purpose. He put away the image of himself, despised and friendless, drifting ever downwards among the scum and the off-scouring of the earth; and pictured to himself instead the image of Lester, handsome, *debonair*, indifferent, riding along a lonely road to his fate. The sudden shot, the reeling figure falling from the saddle, dragged, perhaps, by the startled horse in his headlong flight.

The picture became so vivid that it roused him from the apathy of horror in which he had sat ever since reading the letter. He rose, smoothed out the crumpled paper, which he had been crushing in his hand, remounted his horse, and turned back on the road by which he had come. He had already passed the road branching off towards Colesberg, which must now be his route.

Just as he reached this turning he heard the hoofs of horses—of two or three horses, apparently—approaching from the Colesberg direction. He rode more slowly, and

in another moment perceived three horsemen, who, on seeing Noel, rode up to him.

They were dressed in khaki, with slouch hats, and Noel concluded that they belonged to a colonial troop. One of them asked him for a pass-word, which of course he could not give, and then they began to question him :

‘Have you any arms ?’

‘No !’

‘Where do you come from ?’

‘Wolve Kop.’

‘Whose farm is that ?’

‘Mr. Botha’s.’

‘Botha—a Dutchman. Is your name Botha ?’

‘No, I am English. My name is Johnson.’

‘Where are you going ?’

‘To Colesberg.’

‘On what business ?’

‘My own.’

The troopers laughed.

‘That won’t do,’ said the one who was catechising him ; ‘if you are not up to mischief, you will not mind telling us what your business is.’

‘I am going to try to get my money out of the bank,’ said Noel, haphazard.

‘You can’t get into Colesberg,’ returned one of the troopers, ‘our camp is there, and the Dutchies are shut in.’

Noel was silent. He was thinking whether it would be of any use to tell these men the real truth. Of course not ! They would not believe him for a moment.

‘This fellow is suspicious,’ said one of the men who had not spoken before. ‘See if he has any papers.’

Noel saw that it was useless to offer any resistance, and he did not wait to be searched. The only letter he had with him was Botha’s, and he gave it up. The men read it, passing it from one to the other.

‘Lester ! That’s the chap that came to our sergeant with despatches a few days ago.’

‘This lad is a Dutch spy,’ said the man who had

suggested searching Noel. ‘We shall have to arrest you,’ he added, turning to Noel. ‘You must come with us now.’

‘Can’t you send a warning to Lester?’ broke out Noel.

The trooper looked at him suspiciously.

‘Why are you so anxious to warn Lester?’ he asked. ‘It strikes me you had better leave Lester alone. This letter is quite safe with me,’ and he pocketed it as he spoke.

Two of the troopers placed themselves on either side of Noel, and one took his horse’s bridle. The third one rode behind.

‘Ought we to take him to Colesberg?’ asked one.

‘No,’ replied the one who seemed to be the eldest of the three, ‘we will take him to our sergeant first. He will examine him, and decide what to do with him.’

Thereupon, they started along the road on which Noel had just turned back. He wondered whether he had been riding straight into an English camp, and whether, if so, Botha had known it, and had purposely sent him that way; but that seemed hardly likely, and, in fact, soon after they had passed the place where Noel had dismounted to read his letter, they turned off again, in the direction of Hanover. Half an hour’s ride brought them to a farm, where a small troop of scouts, out on patrol, were encamped; the moon was just setting as they approached it, but it still wanted two hours of dawn.

Noel’s thoughts were gloomy enough; yet it was some comfort to him to reflect that he was in the hands of Englishmen, who would, at all events, be just, and would give him a fair hearing.

With the Boers his life would have been safe; but the safety would have been purchased with a price from which his whole soul revolted—with the blood, perchance, of Nora’s father!

## CHAPTER XXIX

*Isab.*— ‘ Yet show some pity.

*Ang.*—I show it most of all when I show justice ;  
 For then I pity those I do not know,  
 Which a dismiss’d offence would after gall ;  
 And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,  
 Lives not to act another. Be satisfied ;  
 Your brother dies to-morrow ; be content.’

THE troopers kept guard over Noel until daylight, when they brought him before the sergeant, who had taken possession of one of the rooms in the house for the time being.

Noel looked at this man, in whose hands lay his immediate fate, with interest, the more so as something in the sergeant’s features was faintly familiar to him. He was trying to recollect whether he had ever met the man before, while at the same time collecting his wits to answer the questions addressed to him.

The sergeant had Botha’s letter in his hand. He said to Noel :

‘ Did Mr. Botha give you this letter himself ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ When ? ’

‘ Last night—about nine o’clock.’

‘ Are you staying at Wolve Kop ? ’

‘ I have been living there for some time.’

‘ You are working for Mr. Botha ? ’

‘ I was,’ said Noel, with a little emphasis.

‘ I have heard of this Botha of Wolve Kop,’ observed the sergeant ; ‘ he is a rebel, and an agent of the Transvaal Government. You say that you are an Englishman, but you are evidently on the Dutch side, or you would have left him.’

‘ I have taken no side hitherto,’ replied Noel ; ‘ I stayed with Mr. Botha because I had to earn my living.’

' You undertook, however, to carry a despatch for him.'

' He misled me as to its contents.'

' Did he give it to you open?'

' No.'

' But when it was taken from you it was already open. You had opened it and read it?'

' Yes.'

' Why did you do that?'

' Because I suspected that the contents were not what I had been led to suppose.'

' And you found you were right?'

' Yes, and then I turned back.'

' Were you going back to Wolve Kop?'

' No, I was going to try to warn Mr. Lester, who is personally known to me. I was not on the road to Mr. Van der Byl's farm when your troopers met me.'

' Was he not?' asked the sergeant, turning to one of the troopers who stood by.

' I don't know where Mr. Van der Byl's farm is,' the man replied, ' but when we found the prisoner, he was just at the corner of the road to Colesberg. He said he was going there, but he might have been going anywhere.'

' See if there is anyone here who can tell us the exact position of Van der Byl's farm,' said the sergeant to one of his men, who immediately went out. Then, turning to Noel, he continued: ' A man who will open and read a letter entrusted to his charge must not be surprised if his word does not carry much weight. Your story is improbable, to say the least. Moreover, you told my men that you were going to Colesberg to get your money out of the bank, which was evidently untrue.'

' I did not know that Colesberg was shut up,' said Noel.

' That I can believe, as it was only shut up yesterday. But you had no reason to think that you would find Mr Lester in Colesberg.'

' I intended to go through, and try to strike the road which he must take.'

The sergeant shook his head doubtfully. He had a very curt, almost harsh manner, and Noel was still haunted by a

recognition which eluded him whenever he tried to grasp it. Surely he had seen somewhere those very keen, yet short-sighted, eyes, whose dark brown contrasted so markedly with the fair hair.

Presently the sergeant's messenger returned, and said that there was one of the troopers, now on sentry, who knew Van der Byl and his farm and all the neighbourhood well.

'Take his place and send him here,' said the sergeant.

The trooper came in, and explained the position of Van der Byl's farm and the roads leading to it.

'But there is another thing,' observed the sergeant; 'this letter is addressed to Van der Byl, but is written to a man named Bezuidenhout.'

'Bezuidenhout is Van der Byl's son-in-law,' said the trooper, 'and he lives, or used to live, just outside Colesberg.'

'Ah!' said the sergeant, 'and where is this place where Lester was to be held up?'

He read the description of it, which was in great detail.

'That would be near Bezuidenhout's place,' said the trooper, 'much nearer than to Van der Byl's.'

'Then, probably, Van der Byl has means of communication with his son-in-law. Is he suspect himself?'

'No, he is supposed to be loyal.'

'What we want to prove, however,' continued the sergeant, 'is that the prisoner was not on the road to Van der Byl's when he was taken.'

The trooper, who evidently knew every inch of the country, asked where the prisoner was taken. When he understood, he said, 'There is a footpath through that way, which is a short cut to Van der Byl's. It is quite passable for a horse, though not for a cart.'

'I did not know of it,' said Noel, but he saw that it was useless to defend himself. He had been taken red-handed, all the evidence was against him, and his word, very naturally, was not believed.

The sergeant was seated at a table, Noel standing on the other side of it. The sergeant had taken out of his pocket an envelope, on the reverse side of which he had been

sketching a little plan of the roads and the places they had been talking about. Just at that moment he chanced to turn it over, and Noel in a flash saw the name on it—Sergeant Neilson.

His heart was strangely stirred, as he looked at that half familiar face again. Could it possibly be——?

And then the sergeant stretched out his hand to reach a pen, and his sleeve slipping back, disclosed a long white scar on the arm. Noel felt his brain whirling; but before he could think whether to speak or what to speak, he heard the order given to take him away, and keep a strict guard over him, an order which was promptly obeyed.

The sergeant took a sheet of paper, and began writing out a note of what had just passed. The other men went away, except one, who presently remarked:

‘I suppose we shall have to take that fellow on with us?’

‘I think it will be best to take him to the General at Colesberg,’ replied the sergeant, without raising his eyes.

‘I wonder what they will do with him,’ said the other.

‘If they listen to me,’ observed the sergeant, ‘they will shoot him out of hand.’

‘You would advise them to do so?’

‘I shall use my utmost efforts to induce them to do so.’

‘Of course he ought to be shot; but he seems such an awfully young chap.’

‘I don’t see that his age makes any difference.’

‘If he were imprisoned till the end of the war he couldn’t do any more mischief after that.’

‘How do you know he couldn’t? I tell you, Jackson, these half-and-half Englishmen, employed as spies, form one of our greatest dangers. They carry information everywhere, they baffle our movements, they discover and betray our plans. There ought to be no mercy shown them. They are really not brave men, and if a few of them were shot now we should have less trouble with them hereafter.’

‘I agree with every word of that,’ replied Jackson, ‘but still I feel sorry for this lad. He seems such a gentleman.’

'That makes it all the worse. If he is an educated, intelligent man he is so much the more dangerous.'

'And you will do your best to get him shot?'

'Undoubtedly I will. It is the most humane course in the end. The sacrifice of his life may mean the saving of many more.'

'I suppose you are right,' said Jackson with a sigh, and he got up and went out, leaving the sergeant alone.

He suspended his writing for a minute, and sat thinking.

Was this young fellow's life worth saving? He appeared to be a rather shuffling, namby-pamby sort—not the sort of man who appealed to the sergeant's respect or compassion. Decidedly he had much better be shot, as an example to deter better men. The sergeant had overwhelming evidence against him and he would make the most of it.

He resumed his writing, with a face like a flint.

Just then Jackson re-entered the room, followed by a young trooper.

'Excuse me, sir,' said the latter, saluting, 'I don't know if that prisoner is daft, but when I took him his breakfast just now, he asked me what was your Christian name. He was very civil about it, and I thought there was no harm in telling him. Then he muttered something to himself, and he took this off his watch chain, and asked me to give it you. I thought it was just tomfoolery, but he begged so hard, and made such a favour of it, that I said I would do it.'

He held out to the sergeant a tiny leaden anchor, attached to a ring, and put it into his hand.

A curious change came over the sergeant's face when he saw it. He gazed before him, and his eyes seemed to be looking at something very far away.

'All right, Evans,' he said presently, rousing himself, and he slipped the little anchor in his breast pocket.

Jackson looked at him curiously, but he knew better than to ask questions of Neilson when he had that sealed-up expression about his mouth. He sat down silently, and the sergeant finished writing his report.

The cart-house had been made a temporary prison for Noel, the door was fastened securely, and the troopers kept strict watch outside. Noel sat down on the floor and contemplated his fate.

Last night, before he was taken, if anyone had told him death was at hand he would have said that it was welcome ; but now, in the fresh morning sunlight, it seemed an ugly prospect to be shot. For that, he felt certain, was what awaited him. And life was still dear to him. After all, he was young—only twenty-one, and there might still be better things in store for him—he might still have a chance of recovering himself.

But now he was to be shot, very likely at once. He had read it in the sergeant's inexorable eye.

And yet this man, his judge, was, he felt almost certain, the friend of his childhood, Gronow Neilson.

If only he could make sure of that, and let him know who he was himself ! And then would he believe it ?

It was at this point in his reflections that he remembered the leaden anchor, and fingering his watch chain found that it was still hanging there.

'I wonder if he would remember, too,' he murmured ; 'it is just a chance—a bare chance ; but it might help me.'

When Trooper Evans brought him a hunch of bread and a cup of coffee, Noel said to him politely :

'Can you tell me Sergeant Neilson's Christian name ?'

'What business is that of yours ?' asked Evans gruffly.

'None, perhaps,' returned Noel gently, 'but still, I should be very much obliged if you would tell me, and it cannot do any harm.'

Evans was a little bit ashamed of his rough manner.

'His name is Gronow,' he said.

'It is the same,' murmured Noel to himself ; then, slipping the little anchor from his watch chain, he said to the trooper :

'Will you do me a great kindness, and give this to Sergeant Neilson, from his prisoner ? Do not refuse me,' he added with a sad smile, as he read denial in Evans' face,

'I shall probably be shot to-morrow, and it will not hurt you to have done me this little favour.'

Evans' face relaxed.

'All right,' he said curtly; 'I shall look a precious fool, but I'll do it.'

Noel thanked him, and Evans went out, fastening the door after him with great elaboration.

'It is my last cast for life,' Noel said to himself.

## CHAPTER XXX

' . . . The true friend stands close 'midst circling storms,  
When you are poor,—lost,—wrestling thro' a cloud ;  
With whom your ship rides high in freezing calms,  
Its banner, ghostly pale, to him still proud ;  
Whose heart's Blest-Arab-spice dead hope embalms,  
The same, tho' you sate—throned,—or waiting for your shroud.'

THE door of the cart-house was unfastened, and as it swung back, a path of sunshine lay along the dusty floor. A brief order was given to the guard to stand out of earshot, the door was pushed to, and Noel, rising to his feet, found himself face to face with Gronow Neilson.

The sun was not yet high, and it shone through the square, unglazed window, into the long empty cart-house. There was no cart there, nothing but a heap of skins in one corner, some harness hanging on the wall, a couple of saddles thrown across a swinging beam, hung from the roof. There was something in the bare, dusty shed, and the low sunlight, faintly reminiscent of that evening in the carpenter's shed, when the leaden anchor first came, as a plaything, into existence. The scene recurred to both men as they stood there facing each other.

Noel was one who quickly showed signs of fatigue or emotion. He had not slept, and he was in mental torments. His young face looked haggard and unwontedly pale, there were dark circles round his eyes, and his whole figure had an unkempt and forsaken aspect, very significant in one who was always fastidious about his outward appearance.

Gronow's grave features showed no sign of emotion, and it was only very exceptional fatigue that left any trace on them. He was the first to speak :

' So you are Noel,' he said, in a tone that betrayed no shade of doubt.

' Yes, I am.'

Gronow scanned him attentively.

'I see that you are,' he observed quietly; 'in spite of great alterations, I can see that in many respects you are the same.'

'You are the same, too,' replied Noel, returning his gaze. 'I recognised you even at first, though I was not sure.'

There was a pause; then Gronow asked abruptly:

'What has brought you to this?'

Noel detected a tone of compassion in the query, and his hope revived.

'Gronow,' he said earnestly, 'let me tell you everything, exactly as it has happened. Listen to me, and I swear to you, by the God before whom we both stand, that I will tell you the simple truth.'

'Yes—go on,' replied Gronow. He was standing against the side of the little window, and the light fell slanting on his strong, quiet face. Noel leaned against the opposite side and began his tale, from the day that Miss Lanyon adopted him. He told it simply and straightforwardly, without prevarication or self-excuse. One thing only he omitted. He told Gronow that he was Botha's nephew, but he did not tell him that he was the son of Christian Dupleix. If Gronow should prove to be Nora's brother-in-law, that was a piece of information that must be withheld from him.

The story took some time in the telling, but Gronow never interrupted it by a single word. Noel brought it up to the moment of his capture by the troopers, and concluded with the words:

'It is quite true that I was then going to try to warn Lester. And if I am shot to-morrow, I must still say the same.'

He looked direct into Gronow's eyes as he spoke, and his heart leapt within him, for he saw that he was believed.

'You will not be shot to-morrow,' Gronow replied; 'our leaders incline to leniency rather than severity, and I shall be able to save your life.'

'But you cannot save me from disgrace and imprisonment,' Noel remarked bitterly, 'and what can I make of my life after that?'

'I will help you to make something of it—afterwards,' said Gronow, 'you are very young still. I suppose you know your exact age now?'

'I shall be twenty-two next month.'

'As you say,' continued Gronow, 'you will have to undergo a term of imprisonment. I cannot prevent that. But I will do my best to get it shortened, and you can come to me as soon as you are free.'

'It is good of you, Gronow,' said Noel gratefully.

There was another pause, and then Gronow remarked :

'It was certainly a strange coincidence that it should be the same Miss Lanyon who adopted you, who left all her money to Nora. It was very unfair to you; but I suppose Miss Lanyon was out of her mind.'

'I suppose so,' replied Noel; 'it is also strange,' he continued, 'that I should have met Miss Lester, and that you should have married her sister.'

'Yes,' agreed Gronow; 'you found that out, too?'

'I thought it possible; I was not sure of it, of course. And now, perhaps, you can enlighten me on one point about which I have always been entirely in the dark. How did Miss Lanyon come to know Mr. Lester and his daughter, and why did she leave her fortune to them?'

'I believe it was something of this kind,' returned Gronow slowly. 'Miss Lanyon's nephew, Christian Dupleix, to whom half the property would revert, if he or his heirs should be still living, was at one time intimate with Mr. Lester, when both were out in this country, and through dishonest gambling, or some other means, ruined him. I do not know how Miss Lanyon came to know the circumstances, but I heard that she had a fixed idea of restitution, which probably became morbidly exaggerated as she grew older.'

Noel was silent from astonishment. His father, then, had ruined Nora's father! Here was a strong additional reason for concealing his identity; and how thankful he felt that he had always done so! Yet his heart sank as he realised that here was yet another barrier between himself and Nora.

Noel remaining silent, Gronow presently continued :

'It never occurred to me that you were the same Johnson of whom Nora sometimes spoke in her letters. Johnson is a common name. You say that Botha's sister married an Englishman. Johnson is your real name then ?'

Noel hesitated a moment, but he decided to tell the truth.

'No,' he said, 'Johnson is not my real name ; I have a reason for not telling you my real name at present. Please trust me.'

'Your reason has nothing to do with this despatch-riding business ?' asked Gronow, looking at him keenly.

'Nothing whatever,' answered Noel, returning his glance steadily.

'Then it is of no consequence,' said Gronow, satisfied ; 'as far as I am concerned, you can call yourself Johnson to the end of the chapter.'

'There have been a good many curious coincidences about this whole story,' remarked Noel thoughtfully.

'There is another,' said Gronow suddenly, and he smiled at Noel with a frank friendliness which sent a glow to the lad's heart ; 'my wife is only Nora's half-sister. Her maiden name was not Lester, but Deane ; and her own father, Captain Deane, was captain and owner of the *Roumania*, the same vessel from which you were washed ashore. He and all his crew were drowned, and the vessel was lost, as you know.'

'That is indeed strange,' agreed Noel, adding to himself : 'There is the one link of evidence which was wanting, to prove beyond doubt that I am the son of Christian Dupleix.'

His thoughts reverted to his uncle and cousin, and he said suddenly :

'Gronow, if you can manage it for me, don't let them pump me about Botha. I have no affection for him now ; but he is my uncle, and I have eaten his bread for the last two years.'

'I don't think you will be questioned about anyone's

actions but your own,' replied Gronow; 'but of course that letter will be strong evidence against Botha.'

'It is not signed,' observed Noel.

'But it is known that he wrote it. You admitted that he gave it to you.'

'So I did. I ought not to have done so.'

'It will probably be a point in your favour.'

Noel sighed.

'What are you going to do with me?' he asked, 'or must I not know?'

'I am going to take you to Colesberg,' replied Gronow.

Their interview had lasted an hour, and Gronow moved to go.

Noel stepped nearer to him.

'Gronow,' he said, 'you should not have lost sight of me. Miss Lanyon was proud and exclusive, but she was not unkind. If you had seen her yourself, and explained our relations, which you could have done better than I, she would have allowed us to keep in touch with one another; and I might have been worth more, with you to help me.'

Emotion, hitherto suppressed, showed itself now in Gronow's features, as he turned towards Noel.

'You are right,' he said in a low voice. 'I once told my wife about you, and she said the same thing to me. I was hurt and angry, and it made me act hastily and unkindly. I ought not to have let you go so easily, and I ask your forgiveness for it now.'

'Oh no, not that,' exclaimed Noel, 'you could not know. Tell me,' he added quickly, 'are Mrs. Neilson and—her sister quite well, and safe?'

'They were, thank you, last time I heard. My wife has a little daughter, who will be several months old before I see her,' he added, smiling rather sadly.

'It is very hard for both of you,' said Noel sympathetically. 'I should like to ask you lots more questions about yourself, Gronow, but I know I must not keep you now. Will you give me back that little anchor? I value it, you know.'

'It was a happy thought of yours to send it to me,' said

Gronow, and this time his smile brightened, 'but I will not give it to you now. It might be taken from you. Ask me for it again in better days.'

He held out his hand, and Noel willingly put his into it. As he felt that powerful grasp, his heart, despite the gloomy present, grew lighter than it had been for many a long day. The next moment he was a lonely prisoner once more.

' You had a long chat with that fellow,' observed Jackson, whose curiosity overcame him, when his sergeant returned.

' Yes. I find that I knew something of him formerly, though I did not recognise him at first. There are certainly extenuating circumstances in his case, which I shall explain to the commandant.'

' And you won't get him shot after all ? '

' No, not if I can help it.'

' Well, I must say I am glad you have changed your mind,' said Jackson heartily, adding to himself, ' though I am immensely surprised at your doing it.'

' We must start at once, Jackson,' said Gronow, proceeding to give his orders.

A short while later the patrol were riding towards Colesberg, with Noel, carefully guarded, in their midst.

## CHAPTER XXXI

'No ceremony that to great ones 'longs.  
Not the King's crown, nor the deputed sword,  
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,  
Become them with one half so good a grace  
As mercy does.'

NOEL's story had given Gronow much food for reflection. He had made a fair estimate of the boy's character, even in early childhood, and it appeared to have developed very much as he would have expected—with many serious defects, yet full of lovable qualities. This unexpected and most strange renewal of the old tie had stirred Gronow deeply. He was, as we have seen, very tenacious, and very constant. An attachment he had once formed never died, however little it had to feed upon. Noel was the first being he had really loved, and he loved him still.

And now there was mingled with his affection a degree of self-reproach. Noel's simple plaint, 'You should not have lost sight of me,' found an echo in his own heart.

If he had kept up some kind of a relation with the boy he could have helped him in his time of need. Noel, on losing his fortune, could have come straight to him; he could have found work for him, and have kept him out of this Dutch complication. In that case he would, perhaps, never have discovered his relations, but would that have mattered very much? He did not seem to be much happier or better off for knowing who he was.

Gronow, however, was the last man to waste time in useless remorse. His regret for the past only stimulated him to make fresh resolves for the future. Noel should never find him wanting again.

He asked himself the question, What reason could Noel have for concealing from him his real name? He puzzled over this for some time, but there was nothing to suggest

any kind of an answer to him. Whatever the reason might be, however, he was satisfied, from Noel's manner, that there was no wrong-doing connected with it.

There was only one part of Noel's story which made no appeal to Gronow's sympathies, and that was the history of his relations with Hester. He had told it as honestly as he had told all the rest; and it had cost him something to do so, for he had an instinctive consciousness of Gronow's feeling of contempt. Gronow had never looked twice at any woman but Alice, and had never felt the slightest inclination to flirt with any girl, however pretty. He knew that it was a common failing enough, but, as it was not his failing, he despised it. Having delivered up his prisoner to the commandant outside Colesberg, Gronow was obliged to remain over the day to give his evidence. Some of his troopers ran across friends in camp, but Gronow knew no one in this part of the country; he was interested, however, in seeing the camp, which was a large one, and the high kop, crowned with a big gun, which had been hauled up there with strenuous labour. There was something in all the sheer hard work of this war that appealed strongly to Gronow's forcible nature. He felt not only the stern joy of battle, but a joy, not so common, of hardship, and privation, and supreme effort.

It was tolerably late in the evening when Gronow, having nothing particular to do, yet not being free to leave, was strolling round the camp, and found one of the sentries in hot parley with two persons on horseback, a man and a woman. They were evidently Dutch, though they were both speaking English, and they seemed anxious to pass, which the sentry, of course, would not allow them to do.

Just as Gronow drew near he heard the girl say pleadingly :

' But you might at least tell me, if you know, whether there is a prisoner here named Johnson.'

The sentry only shook his head.

' Why do you want to know ? ' asked Gronow, approaching.

She turned towards him eagerly.

'Because I am his cousin, his own cousin, Hester Botha, and it is my fault, my fault entirely, that he is a prisoner. He is not to blame at all. Oh do, please, take me to your General, and let me tell him my story.'

'He knows the story already,' said Gronow.

'But not the whole of it. Noel would not tell my part, he is too generous; besides, he does not know it all.'

Gronow looked at her more attentively. She was slightly flushed, her lips were parted, her eyes sparkled, and her abundant dark hair, somewhat dishevelled with riding, drooped over her forehead. Gronow's reflection was that Noel had some excuse for being fascinated by this girl.

'If I take you in,' he said, 'on the ground that you can give evidence in the prisoner's favour, you will be detained.'

'No matter, I don't mind. Take me in as a prisoner, too, if you like.'

'Who is your companion?' asked Gronow, looking at the other rider.

The gentleman thereupon explained that his name was Piet Steynberg, that he had never lifted a finger against the British Government, and that he was about to marry the young lady whom he had the honour to accompany.

'Do you come now from Wolve Kop?' continued Gronow.

Steynberg seemed suspicious of this question, but Hester answered 'Yes,' before he could stop her.

'You made a mistake in coming here,' observed Gronow; 'you will both be arrested and detained. If, on examination, there is nothing against you, you will both be allowed to go.'

Steynberg seemed inclined to protest against this cavalier proceeding, but he presently realised that he had indeed bearded the lion in his den. Gronow summoned another officer, who immediately took his view of the matter.

Piet and Hester were brought into camp, and detained temporarily as prisoners.

Their presence there must be briefly explained.

Botha had scouts out all over the neighbourhood, and not many hours after Noel's capture one of them informed him of it, and that Noel had been taken to Colesberg.

'The next move in the game will be my arrest,' Botha remarked coolly. 'I must be off. And you, Hester, what will you do? You cannot remain here alone.'

'I will go to our neighbours, the Landmanns,' Hester replied. 'Piet will take me there.'

Piet expressed his willingness.

'But I must see you away first, father,' Hester continued. She was anxious about him, and hastened his departure.

'You will promise me to leave as soon as I am gone?' urged her father.

'Yes, father, I promise,' she replied.

Botha had been gone about half an hour when Hester came to her *fiancé* and said :

'Piet, you must ride with me to Colesberg.'

'To Colesberg?' ejaculated Piet, staring.

'Yes, Noel will be shot, and I must try to prevent it. It is all our doing really, and though I don't—no, I *don't* want to marry him, Piet—but I am fond of him all the same, and now I am miserable about him. If he is shot I shall always feel as if I had murdered him. If you will not come with me I will go alone.'

Piet was more than unwilling, but he had to yield to Hester's insistence. Moreover, he perceived that she was quite ready to carry out her threat of going alone. So he went, with the result above recorded.

Hester's story as she told it to the commandant was this: Noel had never actively taken either side in the war. He had supposed that he was going to Mr. Van der Byl on ordinary business, about stock or something. She, Hester, had slipped the incriminating letter into the pocket of the coat he was going to ride in, before he put it on. Noel knew nothing about it; but Mr. Van der Byl was expecting it, and would have asked him for it.

'If he knew nothing of the note, how could he have opened it and read it?' suggested the commandant.

'I did not know he had done so,' replied Hester, 'but I suppose he found it in his pocket and felt suspicious.'

'This does not tally at all with the prisoner's story,' observed the commandant.

'If he told a different story, it was out of generosity to spare me,' exclaimed Hester eagerly. 'Indeed, indeed, he is innocent! Oh, please do not shoot him! You will be taking the life of an innocent man!'

Gronow, who was present, did not believe Hester's story, because he believed Noel's. He saw that she was ready to say anything just to save Noel's life. As he was conducting her out of the room, therefore, he said to her quietly:

'Do not be afraid. Noel will not be shot. He will be imprisoned.'

She gave him an intensely grateful glance.

'Did he say anything about me?' she asked.

Gronow did not think it desirable to answer very fully. 'He told me that you were his cousin,' he replied.

'He is quite a near cousin,' she said. 'My father's sister married Noel's father, Christian Dupleix.'

'Christian Dupleix!' exclaimed Gronow in a low tone.

Hester took alarm at once.

'Oh, how foolish of me!' she cried, distressed. 'I ought not to have told his real name. We agreed that he should keep the name of Johnson, because it would be safer for him to have quite an English name while the war lasted.'

'Do not distress yourself,' said Gronow; 'I shall not repeat anything to injure either you or him.'

Hester's gratitude was genuine.

'Do you think I might be allowed to see him, if only for a minute?' was her next query.

'Not alone, certainly,' replied Gronow, 'and not to-night. But I will see what I can do for you.'

Gronow, having performed his task, had to return the next morning with his patrol to their own camp; but with characteristic determination he managed to procure two things before he started. One was a very brief interview between Noel and Hester; and the other, a somewhat longer one between Noel and himself.

It is to be feared that Hester did not get much satisfaction out of her interview, which took place in the presence of a callous and uninterested soldier. She was not allowed to go close to Noel, or to take his hand.

'Noel, I am very, very sorry. I never thought it would come to this. You believe me, do you not ?'

'I do not know what to believe about you,' Noel replied in a hard tone. 'Yes, I will believe that you are sorry, since you say so; but, look here, Hester, I once promised your father that I would protect you if you were deprived of his care. You will not need it, since you will have a husband. I consider myself absolved from my promise.'

'Yes, Noel; but you will not always feel bitter against me? Say that you will try to forgive me.'

She looked prettier than ever, with the tears just rising in her dark eyes, and Noel was really touched by the sight of her distress, but he forced himself to answer in a cool, quiet tone:

'Oh, yes, I forgive you, Hester. I was quite as much to blame as you. They will not let you stay. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Noel,' and Hester went out in tears.

When Gronow came to take his leave of Noel he said to him abruptly:

'Why did you not wish me to know that you were the son of Christian Dupleix?'

'How did you find it out?' exclaimed Noel.

'Miss Botha let it out.'

'Let it out?'

'Yes, before I could stop her, or even guess what she was going to say. You don't suppose I asked her your real name?'

'No, of course not, Gronow. How can you ask me such a thing?'

'But what was your object in concealing it?' Gronow could not understand this yet.

'I will tell you,' said Noel, after a short pause. 'When I first found it out I intended to tell the lawyers, and claim my half of the property, because I knew that Miss Lester would still have an ample fortune if I did. But just before I despatched my letter I heard of the loss of the money; and then I thought that, even if some of it were recovered, it would only be just enough for her, and I should feel mean if I took half. So I decided to keep quiet, and stick to the good old name of Johnson.'

Gronow was silent a minute. This threw a new light on Noel's character. At last he said :

'That was generously done, Noel. And now I know you are going to ask me to keep up the deception. But I cannot do it. It would be quite illegal.'

'But what does it signify,' argued Noel, 'if I choose to give up my claim of my own accord ?'

'I could not allow you to give it up. It would be an offence against the law. It is likely that a good deal of the money will be recovered, so that there will be plenty for both of you. Besides that, if it ever leaked out in any other way, Nora would never forgive me.'

Noel winced a little.

'Well,' he sighed, 'if you are the same fellow that you used to be, Gronow, I know it is no use trying to turn you from what you think right.'

'It will be much better in the end to have no secrecy,' replied Gronow.

'May I ask one thing ?' Noel said presently. 'Have they arrested my uncle ?'

'No,' answered Gronow. 'They sent men to do so, but he was gone, and the house was empty.'

'He will join the Boer forces now,' observed Noel.

'He has probably done so already,' agreed Gronow. 'And now, Noel, I must be off. Good-bye, my lad, don't let your spirit fail you, and remember, as long as I live you have a friend who will always do his utmost for you. If I should be shot, my wife will be a true friend to you, and will always be glad to see you ; I will answer for it.'

Noel made no audible reply. They clasped hands and parted.

No evidence of any kind being forthcoming against Piet Steynberg, he was released after a few days ; and Hester, whose story about Noel was not accepted, was allowed to depart also. Noel had said nothing to incriminate her, except what he had told privately to Gronow, who regarded that, of course, as confidence.

She was accordingly warned and dismissed.

As for Noel, he was sent away to a strict confinement ;

but, Gronow having made the most of every circumstance in his favour, and having had no scruple in saying that Botha had thoroughly misled him, his term of imprisonment was ultimately fixed at six months, after which he was to be released on giving his oath to take no further part in the war.

He was allowed to correspond with no one; so that during those six months he remained in absolute ignorance of the fortunes and doings of Gronow, Alice, and Nora.

## CHAPTER XXXII

'The flesh may fail, the heart may faint,  
But who are we to make complaint,  
Or dare to plead, in times like these,  
The weakness of our love of ease ?'

THE room was scantily furnished, small, and oppressively warm, in spite of the wide open window. The street outside was narrow and noisy. Thunder clouds were brooding overhead, and there was a weight of depression in the still, midday air. Amidst these surroundings Alice sat at work—endless needlework, which was in her hands most of the day now. Beside her was a plain wooden cradle, with a rocker, in which lay sleeping her four-months-old baby, a little fair girl, with a whimsical likeness to Nora. A small stove in one corner showed that this was their kitchen as well as their living-room.

Alice's face had gathered some fresh lines in the last few months. The nightmare of parting, and of flight; the separation from her husband, who was in constant peril; the impossibility of hearing from him regularly or frequently; the birth of her little girl under these sad circumstances; several weeks of tardy convalescence, weakness, and languor; the grief and anxiety which she shared with all her country-women in the black days of reverse and disaster; and lately, the increasing pressure of poverty—such were the various trials which had crowded these months, and drawn those lines on Alice's brow, as on that of many another refugee.

A clatter of feet on the narrow staircase (Alice's two rooms were over a chemist's shop), a simultaneous chatter of fresh young voices, and a happier gleam came into Alice's eye, as the door flew open, and little Gronow came running in, followed by Nora, waving something triumphantly aloft.

'What have I got here, Alice ?'

'Dada's letter ! Dada's letter !' shouted the youngster,

who knew well enough how to bring the smile to his mother's face.

'No keeping a secret when you are by,' laughed Nora, as she threw herself down by the cradle, 'and now, see, we have woke sister again. What a shame! Alice, I am sorry.'

'Never mind, dear; she has had a long sleep; take her up for a minute, please, while I read my letter.'

Nora rocked the cradle a little, and baby obligingly relapsed into slumber, while Alice eagerly opened the envelope, the boy clamouring at her knee for news of Dada.

'What a long letter for Gronow!' exclaimed Alice, laughing, for Gronow was not an ideal correspondent, being little readier with his pen than with his tongue; he has sent some money, too, dear fellow,' she continued, taking a couple of crackling notes from the letter.

'That's a good thing, as the exchequer is getting decidedly low,' observed Nora, 'and Mr. Abdy doesn't seem to get much nearer to the settlement of his affairs.'

'He is well and safe,' observed Alice contentedly, referring, not to Mr. Abdy, but to Gronow, 'and has had a lot of riding about, and a certain amount of fighting——' here she subsided into silence, and became absorbed.

Nora waited a minute or two, and then said impatiently, 'But what is it all about, Alice?'

'Oh, Nora, this *is* interesting. I must read it out to you.'

'That is just what I am dying for you to do.'

It was Gronow's account of his meeting with Noel.

Strong feeling for once had made him eloquent, and though he wrote briefly, telling little besides the bare facts, his few and simple words were somehow very graphic and very touching. It was necessary first for Alice to explain to Nora who Noel was, as Nora had never heard of him in her life. The story of his childhood aroused her keenest interest at once, and as the story of his manhood was gradually unfolded in Gronow's letter the interest of both became almost painful.

'Oh, Alice, it is quite a romance!' Nora exclaimed, with

shining eyes. ‘And to think that he was that Mr. Johnson all the time! But go on, there is some more.’

There was indeed some more; there was Hester Botha’s revelation of Noel’s real identity.

Alice laid down the letter, and the two sisters looked at each other, almost awe-struck.

‘Why did he not tell me?’ Nora said at last in a low voice.

Alice returned to the letter.

‘He generously concealed his identity,’ wrote Gronow, ‘when he heard of the loss of the money, because he would not deprive Nora of half her diminished fortune.’

‘Oh, that was good of him!’ murmured Nora, flushing, and she bent over the cradle for a minute.

‘What have they done to him?’ she asked presently, raising an anxious face.

‘He has got six months’ imprisonment, poor fellow!’ replied Alice compassionately.

‘Does Gronow say anything more?’ asked Nora.

‘Yes, he says that Noel—Mr. Dupleix, as we must call him—has given his word not to take any further part in the war; so that when he leaves prison he will come to Cape-town, and we must befriend him and help him. He says that Mr. Warren will help him if we ask him.’

‘And by that time,’ added Nora, ‘Mr. Abdy may be sending me some money, and then the half of it will belong to him.’

‘If he will take it,’ observed Alice. ‘Gronow asks me, or you, to write and tell Mr. Abdy all this, as Noel cannot write now, and Gronow has not time—besides, his letters are so uncertain.’

‘I will write to Mr. Abdy by next mail,’ said Nora. ‘How surprised he will be to find that Miss Lanyon’s adopted son, whom he has known all these years, is Christian Dupleix’s son after all!’

‘It seems extraordinary when one thinks of it,’ remarked Alice, ‘that Miss Lanyon should have picked him out of a hundred children, and brought him up, without ever guessing that he was her great-nephew.’

'And especially with her morbid ideas of compensation or retribution, or something of the sort,' agreed Nora.

'I am afraid your father won't like this,' Alice said presently, with a little hesitation.

'Like what?' asked Nora rather sharply.

'This resurrection of Christian Dupleix in the person of his son. He is always so bitter against the memory of that man.'

'Perhaps he will be satisfied when he knows that the son is in prison,' Nora replied with an unwonted sarcasm; and, after a pause, she continued:

'If you do not mind, Alice, I should like to copy that part of Gronow's letter, and send it to father.'

'Certainly. But do you know where he is now?'

'He told me to write to him, care of Colonel Somebody, at Colesberg.'

'Will you light the stove, please, Nora? We must have some tea, and then I must really go out and get a breath of fresh air.'

While they were eating their frugal meal, Alice re-read her husband's letter, and in answer to little Gronow's importunate inquiries, explained to him that Dada had once taken care of another little boy years ago; and he had not seen him for such a long time, that the little boy had grown up into a man; and now Dada had met him again, and saved him from being shot.

The child listened very attentively, but how much he understood they could not tell, until afterwards they heard him retailing the story, with explanatory comments of his own, to his baby sister, whose quiescent attitude during the recital evidently satisfied him.

A thunder-shower which fell while they were having tea refreshed the air, and they all went out after it was over, Nora wheeling the perambulator, and little Gronow holding his mother's hand.

They went into the Botanical Gardens, where are many pleasant shady seats, and had been sitting, or roaming about, for an hour or so, when Nora suddenly exclaimed:

'Why, Alice, I declare there is Miss Mayer!'

There they were, undoubtedly, both of them, Miss Mayer in grass green, with a mountain of white ostrich feathers in her hat; and Miss Lydia in brown velveteen, as peculiarly adapted to a warm summer evening in Capetown.

They greeted Alice and Nora with hearty friendliness.

'Hoped we should meet you,' said Miss Lydia.

'Very warm, isn't it?' added Miss Mayer.

'Are you refugees, too?' asked Nora.

'Yes, we're refugees, too,' smiled Miss Lydia; 'the farm is quite destroyed, you know. Take a long time to get it right again.'

'I am very sorry to hear that,' said Alice sympathetically, 'and is your brother here, too?'

'Eldred in the hospital,' replied Miss Mayer.

'New Somerset Hospital,' explained Miss Lydia.

'Really!' exclaimed Nora. 'What is the matter with him?'

'Same thing he went to England about,' said Miss Lydia; 'he had an operation, and now he has to have another.'

'Oh, Miss Mayer, what a lot of trouble for you!' exclaimed Alice, 'all coming at once. I hope Mr. Mayer is not dangerously ill?'

'Doctor says it's not dangerous,' answered Miss Lydia, 'but he will have to be in hospital a long time. Six weeks.'

'And have you really lost everything?' asked Nora.

'John says he worth twenty thousand pounds last year, and now not worth twenty thousand pence,' replied Miss Mayer placidly.

'Ah, well, life is all ups and downs,' added Miss Lydia; 'we must take the rough with the smooth.'

'Can't have it all smooth,' subjoined her sister, 'nobody can expect to have that.'

'This is the new baby, Mrs. Neilson's little girl; we haven't seen her,' said Miss Lydia, suddenly changing the subject. 'What a pretty little thing, isn't she?'

They both began smiling and nodding at the baby, who received their attentions with a condescending stare. Both Nora and Alice, however, noticed an increase of wrinkles on the kindly old faces, a suspiciously worn and tired look

about the eyes, as if they had shed a good many secret tears ; and they guessed that the cheerful speech, and placid manner, the quaint little habitual conventionalities, which no calamity could make them forget, were but the outward covering to hide two very sore hearts. With all their superficial oddities of dress, manner, and speech, they were at heart simple, self-contained, enduring, matter-of-fact English-women. They made many inquiries after Gronow and Mr. Lester, and told Nora, as a piece of news, that Mr. Botha, of Wolve Kop, had almost been arrested, but had escaped, and was supposed to have joined the Boer forces, and that his daughter was about to be married. They did not know anything about Noel, and Alice thought it better to reserve that story for Mr. Mayer's ears, when he should be well enough to hear it. She and Nora both promised to go and see him in the hospital, as soon as he should be allowed to have visitors.

The Misses Mayer were staying with a friend at present, but their future prospects were gloomy enough. When their little stock of money gave out, they said, they supposed they would have to go to the refugee camp.

'Oh, but that will be dreadful !' exclaimed Alice, who had visited the camp several times.

'They take very good care of them, don't they ?' asked Miss Lydia.

'Yes, they do. But still, after always living in your own home, to have to live in a shanty or a tent, and do all your own work, and mix up with all sorts of people !' returned Alice.

'Well, we shall see,' observed Miss Mayer cheerfully. 'Eldred says Gilbert, that's our nephew, will do something for us.'

'He ought to if he can,' said Nora earnestly.

They parted, promising to see each other often ; and as Alice and Nora walked home, they occupied themselves with devising ways and means by which they, in their poverty, might still brighten the lot of their three poor old friends, who were even worse off, in that they had age and sickness to contend with.

It was two or three weeks later that the sisters went to the hospital to see Mr. Mayer. He was sitting up in bed, and received them with the same beaming cheerfulness that his sisters displayed.

'I shall soon be out, I hope,' he said; 'this was not nearly such a serious operation as the last. And then I must try to get something to do, for my poor sisters will be hard up, I am afraid.'

'But you will not be able to work, Mr. Mayer!'

'Oh yes, light work—writing, or something of that. And my nephew, Gilbert, writes me a very nice letter, and sends me some money for expenses. He is on the war-path too; he has joined the Imperial Light Horse.'

'I hope he will send you money regularly,' said Nora.

'Oh, I don't want to be a drain on him, that wouldn't be fair. It is only for my sisters I want his help. I will manage for myself somehow.'

Alice felt shamed by his admirable courage and patience.

'I have something to tell you that will interest you, Mr. Mayer,' she said.

She and Nora had discussed together how much it would be well to tell him of Noel's story, and they had decided not to touch on the part concerning the money, but to call him Mr. Johnson for the present.

'When he is free he can tell outsiders what he likes himself,' Alice said, and Nora quite agreed with her.

Mayer was interested and sympathetic to the last degree.

'The poor lad!' he observed compassionately, 'that was a regular trap he fell into. Yes, I heard not long ago that he turned out to be Botha's nephew, and I thought it was rather a pity. I should never have guessed that he had any Dutch blood myself. I wish now that he had come to me from the first. He would have been ruined, perhaps, as I am, but at least he would not have been in prison.'

'We must do all we can for him when he comes out,' said Alice.

'That's so. The lad shall never want a friend while I am above ground,' returned Mayer.

As the weary months of war went on, matters began to

brighten a little by slow degrees. Gronow passed unscathed through all the perils of battle, while hardship and exposure seemed to act as tonics on his magnificent constitution. Alice, Nora, and the two children kept well, and were in better circumstances, as Gronow was able to send money more regularly; moreover, Mr. Abdy, having at last settled his affairs, and recovered a fair sum of money from his recreant partner, began to send Nora a small quarterly income, which he told her would increase with time. The half of this Nora religiously put in the Post Office Savings Bank for Noel, when he should come to claim it.

Mr. Mayer came out of the hospital, restored in health, and by the kind influence of friends obtained some book-keeping to do. The nephew sent periodical contributions, and the three old people took little rooms not far from Alice and Nora, to whom they were most welcome neighbours.

Even to Noel the long, long days and nights brought a gradually increasing hope, which brightened into anticipation as the time of his deliverance drew near.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

'For this I will my wound in quiet bear,  
And live with patience, if but live I may ;  
For all he conquers, who will not despair ;  
A man by patience wins in every fray.

. . . . .  
My sorrow's port I hope to find anon ;  
My heart has learnt not by long pain to veer.'

NORA was sitting with her back to the open window, softly singing to sleep her little niece, who lay on her lap. The bright winter sunshine, slanting through the window, shone right through the yellow fluff of hair, giving it an extra tinge of gold. Alice had gone out shopping, taking the boy with her, so Nora was alone.

Their rooms, as before said, were just over the chemist's shop, and they were so used to the murmur of conversation underneath, and the tramping of feet in and out, that they never noticed it. Nora, therefore, did not now observe men's voices talking below, nor even a footstep that came up the stair ; for the staircase led to other rooms beside theirs. When, however, a knock came at the door, she thought it must be Mr. Mayer, and called out, 'Come in,' in a cordial tone. Thereupon the door opened, and there entered, as Nora in the first moment imagined, a perfect stranger. The next moment she saw that it was no stranger, but Noel Dupleix.

She knew that his term of imprisonment must be nearly, if not quite, over, for it was now the beginning of July ; but she was not in the least expecting or thinking of him just then, and at first she sat silent with surprise.

Noel, standing in the doorway, thought he had never seen a pleasanter picture. The fair girl, with bright, earnest face, holding the sleeping child on her knee, looking at him with startled eyes, while the sunlight falling through the window

behind her formed a sort of glory around her figure ; it was an image that remained on his mind for many a long day afterwards.

Nora was about to rise, when Noel, seeing her encumbered with the child, stepped quickly forward, and said :

'Please do not disturb yourself, Miss Lester, the child might wake, and that would be a pity. Let me sit here.'

He drew a chair near to her and took her hand in his for a moment.

As Nora looked at him a flood of pity swelled in her breast. Noel was much altered by six months in durance vile. He looked years older, his complexion had faded to a uniform pallor, his eye had lost its brightness. He even seemed to stoop a little, as a man who has so long borne a heavy weight, that when it is removed he can no longer stand upright.

'I am *very* glad to see you here, Mr. Dupleix,' Nora said impetuously.

'Thank you,' he replied quickly, with a sudden flash of his old bright smile ; 'it is very kind of you to welcome me thus, after all that is passed.'

'It is because Gronow gave us a just view of what has passed that we welcome you,' returned Nora.

'Gronow is——' began Noel, and paused for want of a suitable word to express his feelings. 'Tell me about him,' he continued abruptly, 'I am thirsting for news, of which I know no more than if I had just risen from my grave.'

Nora bent on him a look of overflowing sympathy that brought his heart into his mouth.

'Gronow is well,' she said ; 'he bears a charmed life, I think. He seems to be always in the thick of the fighting, yet he has never had a scratch, and his health is perfect.'

'That is right,' said Noel, with a sigh of relief. 'And Mrs. Neilson and yourself—you have been keeping well ?'

'First-rate,' replied Nora, 'and the children are flourishing to a degree. Alice is out with the boy, but she will be in directly. And this is the girl.'

Noel bent over the baby in order to be a little nearer to Nora.

'Gronow has not seen this one yet?' he asked.

'No—poor Gronow! Doesn't it seem hard? And she is such a good baby, and so sweet. Oh, and do you know, Mr. Dupleix, the Mayers are in town, too.'

'Are they? How is that?'

'They lost all their stock and crops, and their store was looted and the house partly burnt. And besides that, Mr. Mayer was ill, and had to come to the hospital for another operation. But now he has been well a long time, and has some book-keeping to do. I am afraid they are hard up, all the same.'

'I am very sorry,' said Noel thoughtfully; 'they are not young, and it comes hard on them. I shall have to look out for some work, too,' he concluded.

'I want to tell you,' began Nora, colouring deeply, and plunging abruptly into her subject, 'that some of that money has been recovered, and by-and-bye there will be more. Mr. Abdy has sent me some twice—two quarters—and I put half—your half—into the Savings Bank.'

'I don't want it; I had much rather you kept it,' murmured Noel, almost as much embarrassed as she was.

'But I can't keep it—it is yours,' answered Nora, gathering courage as she went on. 'It was very generous of you to hide who you were from me when the money was lost, but I am very glad that Gronow found it out and told us. I would much rather know.'

'Gronow wouldn't keep it dark at any price,' laughed Noel. 'He is the most uncompromisingly straight fellow I ever knew.'

'He is splendid!' said Nora fervently, and Noel heartily agreed.

'Wasn't it strange,' he said presently, in a confidential way, 'that you and I should meet at first without knowing about each other?'

'Yes, it was very strange,' agreed Nora. 'That first night at the railway station! But you must have soon guessed who I was when you came to Limoen Kop,' she added.

'Oh, yes; I soon found out,' returned Noel, 'and that was long before I knew who I was.'

'I think I was rather supercilious to you in those days,' observed Nora reflectively; 'I, who ought to have humbled myself in the dust, if I had only known.'

'I don't see why,' replied Noel. 'It was not your fault. I suppose,' he added with a little hesitation, 'you cannot tell me anything about the Bothas?'

'I saw the marriage of Miss Botha in the paper,' answered Nora, 'to a Mr. ——'

'Steynberg,' suggested Noel.

'Yes, that was it. And we heard from one or two sources that her father had joined a Free State commando; but I could not say if I had seen his name mentioned, there are so many Bothas.'

'Enough to stock a town,' observed Noel.

At this juncture Alice returned. At the first moment she, too, did not recognise Noel, for she had only seen him once before; but as soon as she understood who he was she gave him a most hearty welcome.

Little Gronow, seeing a man in the room who was not Mr. Mayer, at first ran forward with a joyful cry of 'Dada!' but stopped short, and retreated to his mother on seeing a stranger.

'I hope this is the beginning of better times, Mr. Dupleix,' Alice said cordially; 'you must put away the past altogether now, as if it had never been, and begin a new future in a new name. We shall do our best to help you.'

'I think I have the kindest friends that ever a man did not deserve,' responded Noel, 'and my one effort now must be to try to be worthy of your friendship.'

'You must go and see the Mayers,' Alice said, to change the subject; 'it is close by here, and Mr. Mayer said to me the other day that there was another room to be had in the house, which perhaps you would like to take when you came.'

'That will be a delightful arrangement,' replied Noel, 'but, of course, it must partly depend on my getting some occupation in Capetown.'

Nora gave him a shy, pleading glance, which was not lost on Alice.

'I hope you will not refuse to take your dues, Mr. Dupleix,' she said frankly; 'it will be very hard on Nora—on all of us—if you do. Instead of committing, as we have hitherto done, an involuntary injustice, we should then feel that we were committing a voluntary one.'

'If you put it in that way, I must needs take it with a good grace,' answered Noel, with all his natural charm of manner. 'I will take it, Mrs. Neilson, gratefully'—but he looked at Nora as he spoke—'and I shall be only too glad of it to keep myself going while I am hunting for work.'

Nora looked immensely relieved.

Noel had many more questions to ask, for he was quite behindhand, of course, with news of the war. He had read newspapers on his way down in the train, which gave him some idea of what was going on to-day, but did nothing to fill up the hiatus of his six months of oblivion. Accordingly one thing led to another, and he remained talking to Alice and Nora for nearly two hours. It was indeed life from the dead to be free, and to sit in this homely room, conversing with two refined and intelligent women, instead of the sickening round of prison routine, the objectless labour, the equally objectless exercise, and the horribly oppressive feeling of isolation, as if the walls of a premature tomb were around him.

They had all forgotten the time, when Noel at length rose and said:

'I am taking up your time most shamefully, but you can have no conception of what it is to a man who has been in Hades to sit and converse rationally and on equal terms with his fellow-creatures once more.'

'Try to forget that hard experience, Mr. Dupleix,' said Alice, as she gave him her hand, 'and never talk about taking up our time. We are only too pleased to have it taken up in such a manner. I am writing to Gronow to-day, and will tell him all about you.'

'I will write to him, too,' said Noel, 'if you will give me his address. And I will go and see the Mayers if you will give me their address.'

'You shall have both,' replied Alice, going to her desk for

Gronow's last letter, while Noel turned to take leave of Nora.

'I must consent to be your co-heir, then?' he said, retaining her hand a moment.

'You are, and you cannot help yourself,' she replied, with the wilful smile he well remembered. 'I wrote and told Mr. Abdy all about you, and directly he knows that you are here he will send you your money quite separately, or give it over to you altogether, I suppose, as you are of age.'

'I am of age, certainly,' smiled Noel, 'but you are not yet, I suppose?'

'No, I am scarcely nineteen,' replied Nora.

Noel went out into the winter sunshine, feeling himself a different man. He had never been in Capetown since that Christmas morning, when he had literally shaken the dust of it from his feet. That was only two years and a half ago, but years so crowded with experience and stern trial that they seemed more than twice as long. Certainly Noel felt himself at least five years older since he had started on that memorable walk which had ended in his first meeting with Nora.

Nora filled most of his thoughts. He had told himself long ago, on that disastrous night that culminated his misdoings and misfortunes, that he loved her; and not a day, not a waking hour, of his imprisonment had passed that he had not told himself the same.

He had not loved Hester; he had not loved any other girl; and this girl, whom he did love—was it likely that he could ever win her?

He told himself to be reasonable; he told himself that he was half a Dutchman, had been imprisoned as a spy, had nearly betrayed her father to his death. He told himself that he was the son of the man who had ruined her father, and that her father would never consent to hear his name, much less to let him marry his daughter. He set all these obstacles in formidable array before his mental vision; yet, down at the bottom of his heart, some little bird whispered of hope, whispered that his lady-love had looked kindly on him, that he was at least an object of interest to her.

Well, he would be very patient. He had to redeem his name and his fortunes, he had to do something that should in some measure atone for his miserable failure in the past, before he could dare to look for any reward in the future. He had yet to justify his manhood, to sow good seed where hitherto he had sown but weeds, before he could expect to reap a harvest of content.

The Mayers were so extremely pleased to see him, and made so much of him, that Noel felt his heart too full of gratitude and friendship.

'A man just out of prison,' he said, 'a spy, a disgraced man, an utter failure! And everybody welcomes me as if I were a hero.'

'My dear lad, we are none of us heroes,' responded Mayer, 'and besides, it is not the heroes who need the welcome; they have their reward. I would rather welcome the man who seems to have failed, because in all failure there is the germ of success.'

'How do you make that out?' asked Noel.

'Because failure gives us a disgust and anger at ourselves which is a stimulus to fresh effort. It teaches us our faults and weaknesses, which success never does. Give me the man who has failed, and struggled to his feet again, rather than the man whose life has been a continual series of successes.'

'You talk like a book, Mr. Mayer,' said Noel.

'Nay, I have never read many books. My books have been just my own life, and the lives of my neighbours. They have taught me all I know.'

'And all you need to know, I think,' replied Noel, smiling. 'I am going to sit at your feet now, Mr. Mayer, and learn how to succeed.'

'There a room to let in this house,' Miss Mayer put in at this juncture.

'Rooms very hard to get in Capetown now,' added Miss Lydia.

'Very dear, too,' continued Miss Mayer; 'this room is not dear.'

'We thought you would like to take this vacant room,'

Mr. Johnson,' said Mayer; 'in fact, I ventured to go so far as to engage it, rooms are so eagerly snapped up now in Capetown. It is small, but it would serve you as a bedroom, and you could take your meals with us.'

'I should like it of all things,' replied Noel.

The arrangement was satisfactorily concluded, and Noel presently established himself in his new quarters. After two or three weeks of weary searching, which reminded him of the search for work in former days, with this difference, that now he had a small settled income to fall back upon, which would keep him from want, he obtained employment with one of the shipping agents ; and forthwith proceeded to spend a succession of happy days in a dusty little office at the docks, whose dingy purlieus were ofttimes, for him, illuminated by fair visions of Nora.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

' If they are true, these hopes that from thee flow,  
If it is real, this sweet expectancy,  
Break down the wall that stands 'twixt me and thee ;  
For pain in prison pent hath double woe.'

IF Noel had to labour at uncongenial tasks all the day, he compensated himself with congenial society when his work was over. He grew to like and respect Mr. Mayer more every day, and a warm friendship sprang up between this apparently ill-assorted pair—the homely, unlettered farmer, and the erstwhile fashionable young man in society. Although the Misses Mayer were not very companionable, their range of ideas being extremely limited, yet their funny little customs and quaint remarks amused Noel infinitely, while he learned to esteem their sterling qualities.

It is needless to say that Noel's Dutch sympathies were a thing of the past. In the first revulsion of feeling, after discovering his uncle's bad faith, he was inclined to think everything that was bad of the Boer; but now, in long conversations with Mayer, and with Alice, he began to take a sane and more reasonable view of the whole question.

Nora was a hot-headed little partisan; but Alice had a less impulsive and more tolerant nature, and had acquired from her husband the habit of looking at both sides of a question. The result was that Noel, having seen so much of both sides, and knowing how much was really true in the Boer arguments, and how much was founded on falsehood, ended by forming about as impartial a judgment on the subject as any man could form in the actual heat of warfare. At the same time, it was a real grief to him that he had Dutch blood in his veins, and he heartily wished himself as wholly English in his descent as he was in his proclivities. He had told Mr. Mayer, from the first, his real name and the

rest of his history. It was much better, as Gronow had said, to have no secrecy; and it was quite impossible to be Dupleix to some of his friends and Johnson to others, even had there been any further object in it. He was glad now to drop the name of Johnson altogether, for it had only painful and unpleasant associations for him.

'That accounts for it,' Mayer observed, when he had heard the whole story; 'you don't show your Dutch blood a bit, but you do show traces of your French ancestors, no doubt.'

'I don't mind the French ancestry at all,' Noel replied, 'but I wish I could squeeze every drop of Dutch blood out of my veins.'

It was not only, or chiefly, with the Mayers, however, that Noel found congenial society. There were very few evenings, half-holidays, or Sundays, that he was not either making himself at home in Mrs. Neilson's little room, or taking long walks with her and Nora, and the children.

Alice introduced him to one or two other families whom she knew herself—the Warrens from Johannesburg, well-to-do refugees, who had a nice little house at Kalk Bay; and a Dutch family, named Van der Merwe, whom Noel discovered to be the same who had once shown him abundant hospitality on his tramp to Colesberg. They were loyal, or said so, and he was pleased to renew their acquaintance.

But the rooms over the chemist's shop held a far greater attraction for Noel than any acquaintances, new or old; an attraction which drew him thither as surely as honey draws the bee to the flower. He was now under the influence of the first serious passion of his life, and he found it a very different matter from the light-hearted flirtations of former days. He knew now the alternations of hope and despair, the anxious waiting for a word or look of encouragement, the wakeful hours of suspense, which all true lovers, if we may believe the poets, are bound to experience.

It is true that Nora gave him some cause for fluctuations of hope and despondency. She was so very friendly sometimes, quite distant at other times; and Noel was still simple enough to wonder why. He had known a good many girls, but this particular girl he had not known.

Nora, for her part, was not going to acknowledge herself in love with any man. She had always rebelled against the commonplace, and it was so very commonplace to fall in love and get married. It was nice to be friendly with men, and treat them like brothers, and that was the relation she meant to establish with Noel.

It was natural, of course, that he should become intimate with them ; circumstances had thrown them together so strangely, they had so many ties and interests in common, and he had so few other friends in Capetown ; it was natural and right that he should make their house a second home ; Gronow wished it, they all wished it ; but that did not mean that of necessity Noel and Nora must fall in love with each other ; that was a story book absurdity.

And so, when Nora found that her heart beat more quickly at the sound of Noel's foot upon the stair, that the quiet evening, or the Sunday walk, seemed very blank if by chance he were not there, that she could not always meet his eyes as frankly as she wished, that some strange feeling subdued her when he sat near her, or touched her—then she began to get frightened and ashamed of her own weakness, and angry with herself for yielding to it ; and the next time Noel came she was cold and stiff, and Noel was unhappy.

The inevitable reaction followed when Nora told herself that it was absurd, and worse than absurd ; it was immodest to be always fancying that Noel was in love with her. No nice-minded girl would have such thoughts. There was really nothing to prevent her from being perfectly friendly and at her ease with him, and in future she would put away all these silly notions. Thereupon she was all smiles and graciousness ; Noel rebounded to the pinnacle of hope, and began to make love more daringly than ever, and so they went through the round again.

Alice, who, with the usual advantage of lookers-on, saw all the moves of this game that was played before her eyes, had not much fear of the ultimate result. She understood pretty well how Nora was feeling about it, but she knew she dared not say a word to her, and that an ill-timed word might do a great deal of mischief.

'I know that if anyone had tried to persuade me about Gronow,' she said to herself smiling, 'I should never have looked at him or spoken to him again. Nora has a great deal of that sort of pride, and she must just be left alone. If Noel cannot gain his own cause, no one else can gain it for him.'

One day when Nora was in the accessible mood, Noel ventured to ask her something which he had long wished to know—namely, whether she had told his history to her father. 'Yes, I sent him a copy of Gronow's letter about you,' Nora replied.

'And may I ask what he said?'

Nora coloured and answered reluctantly :

'He really said scarcely anything, except that it was a very strange coincidence,' she said, and this was true, for Mr. Lester's only other remark on the subject had been that the son appeared to be following in the steps of the father. Nora had been very much hurt by this observation at the time, and she would not have repeated it to Noel for worlds. Noel easily guessed the cause of her embarrassment.

'You need not mind telling me,' he said. 'I know that my father did your father a great wrong, and I could not expect him to give a very cordial welcome to the son.'

'It was not your fault,' replied Nora quickly. 'It was done before you were born.'

'That is true, but still it creates a prejudice against me,' returned Noel; 'I have always felt it as a barrier between you and me.'

'There is no need to feel that,' exclaimed Nora, 'that is like the old exploded idea of hereditary feuds.'

'You have never felt it a barrier yourself, then?' Noel asked tentatively.

'I have never even thought of it,' Nora replied with truth.

'And all the rest,' continued Noel; 'my parentage, my Dutch relations, my faults and failures, my imprisonment as a spy—have you never reckoned all these things as a wall between us which can never be broken down?'

'I don't think it is kind of you to ask me that, Mr.

Dupleix,' said Nora gently. 'Have we ever behaved to you as if these things were present to our minds?'

'No, indeed, you never have,' Noel responded earnestly, 'but I often fear that I impose too much on your kindness. When I think of my unworthy past I often wonder how it is you have admitted me to your friendship.'

'It is not right to be always raking up the past,' replied Nora; 'it would be very ungenerous of us to do so, and it is enervating for you, if you will forgive me for saying so. And after all,' she added, looking round at him with rather mischievous eyes, 'I don't see that *you* did anything very bad, it was all other people's doing.'

'It is not so much that I was bad,' said Noel honestly, 'as that I was weak, which is worse. I allowed myself to drift along, and to be deceived too easily.'

'It was natural that you should trust your own relations,' put in Nora.

'Yet, as I knew that they deceived other people, I might have guessed that they would deceive me, too, and I should have found it out if I had been more alert. It was just folly and weakness on my part, nothing else.'

'You are determined to make the worst of yourself,' remarked Nora.

'I would much rather make the best of myself to you,' he replied, 'but I cannot bear to conceal anything from you.'

'You never have concealed anything to your disadvantage, I think,' said Nora, smiling at him, 'and yet you will never succeed in making us think badly of you.'

'When you talk like that,' exclaimed Noel, drawing nearer to her, 'you make me hope—dare I say what? Will you listen to me, Nora?'

Nora shrank into her shell at once, but Noel was emboldened by her previous kindness, and would not be discouraged.

They were alone together, for Alice was kept with her baby, who had a fit of wakefulness and crying.

'I have loved you for quite a long time,' Noel went on, pleadingly, 'before I knew it myself, when I first met you at

Limoen Kop. I know you think I loved Hester, but indeed I never did. I did flirt with her, I acknowledge that; I have flirted with other girls, too; and when I thought of marrying Hester, it was because it seemed as if there was nothing better for me to do. I thought you were quite, quite out of my reach for ever, and though I had made up my mind to ask Hester to be my wife, I always shrank from it when it came to the point. Then when my disgrace and misfortune came upon me, I thought of you, and I knew how much I loved you, and I knew that I had never loved any other girl, never at all. No one else has ever given me, or could ever give me, the same feeling that you do.'

Noel had poured out all this so rapidly and earnestly that Nora could not have checked him had she wished; and now he paused, with eyes so full of intense pleading fixed on her face, that she could not bear to meet them.

Her frankness and self-possession had quite deserted her, and she just sat silent, with scarlet cheeks, feeling that every moment of that speaking silence committed her to something, she knew not what.

'Why don't you speak, Nora?' Noel said presently. 'If you feel that you cannot respect me or love me enough to be my wife, say so quickly, and I will never trouble you again.'

'Oh, of course I respect you,' burst out Nora, 'but I—I—I don't know—'

'Whether you love me?' he asked gently. 'Will you try and think about it, dear? Because it is life or death to me, you know. Of course there are difficulties, perhaps great ones. I am afraid that your father will not be at all willing; but if you will let me speak to him, try to persuade him—will you?'

'You cannot speak to him, you can only write,' murmured Nora.

'I will go and find him, if I can. If not, I will write. That is, if you say that I may.'

'Yes,' said Nora, in a very low voice.

Noel came nearer still.

'Do you think you can love me, Nora?'

'I think—no, I am sure I do,' said Nora, with a sudden feeling that she was not treating him fairly; and the next moment she did not know if she were glad, or frightened, or sorry, when she felt the strong young arms so close about her, and the warm young lips pressed so passionately to hers.

Ah! that was worth all the kisses so easily obtained from Hester, when Nora, the proud, the shy, the wilful, surrendered her lips to him just for one supreme moment. It was scarcely more than a moment, for she drew herself gently from his embrace directly afterwards; but Noel had tasted the wine of life at last, and was satisfied.

He did not stay very long after that, for Nora withdrew behind an impenetrable veil of tender shyness, and would not allow any more love-making; and Noel himself was content to leave her now, and go away to muse over his bliss, and revolve in his mind what moving arguments he could use that should turn the heart of Mr. Lester towards him.

He had a feeling that Lester had very little right to interfere between himself and Nora, that Gronow and Alice were really the persons to be consulted; but he supposed that for form's sake at least he must make an effort to obtain Mr. Lester's free consent.

He walked long under the starry sky that night, happy in his love. How sweet she was, how good, how far above him! What undeserved good fortune for him, the imprisoned spy, the outcast! Noel had learned in the last two years not to take all good fortune as a matter of course.

Alice, having got her baby to sleep, returned to the other room, and was surprised to find Nora alone.

'Is Noel gone?' she asked. They often called him Noel between themselves.

'Yes,' said Nora briefly.

'Why did he leave so early?' continued Alice, as she sat down and took up some work.

Nora came and sat at her sister's feet, laying her head down on her knee.

'Alice,' she said very softly, 'you think Noel is really good, don't you?'

Alice put aside the work, and laid her hand on her sister's fair head.

'Yes, dear, of course I do. I am sure of it.'

'And Gronow—would he think so too?'

'Yes, I am sure that Gronow would trust him now, just as we do.'

There was a pause, which Alice would not break. Then Nora began again:

'Alice, I don't think father would ever consent.'

'Consent to what, Nora?'

'To let me marry—Noel.'

Alice touched her sister's cheek.

'Is that what you wish, dear?'

'Yes. Oh, Alice, do you think I *ought* to listen to father?'

Alice did not think so at all, but she spoke with caution.

'I think you ought—or rather, Noel ought—to ask him first.'

'Noel is going to do so. But he will refuse most likely.'

Alice knew that this was true.

'Dear Nora, I don't think your father has the right to destroy your happiness,' she said, 'but you must do your best to persuade him. The best thing is for you both to confide in Gronow. He will be on your side, I am certain, and he has a good deal of influence with your father. Of course you must both be content to wait, perhaps a long time, while things are so unsettled.'

'Oh yes, of course we shall not mind that.' Then, very wistfully: 'Alice, *you* are pleased, are you not?'

'Yes, dear, I am very glad,' returned Alice warmly, as she bent down to kiss her sister; 'I think you and Noel are fitted to make each other happy; and for myself, he is quite the nicest brother I could wish for.'

Nora smiled and lifted her head.

'All my trust is in Gronow,' she said.

'And you will not find him fail you,' Alice replied, with confidence.

Nora, too, lay awake with happiness that night. It might be very commonplace to fall in love, but there were certainly many compensations in it; and now that she had really committed the act of folly, she could not by any means persuade herself that she wished it undone.

## CHAPTER XXXV

‘Oh, treason of the blood!—  
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds  
By what you see them act.’

NOEL did not feel quite certain whether fortune had favoured him or not, when, a few days after he had come to an understanding with Nora, Mr. Lester suddenly turned up in person. He had a fortnight’s leave, and had come to see his family.

Noel had already composed in his own mind a most elaborate epistle, calculated to bring Mr. Lester to his view of the question at stake. He did not feel at all sure that he could say it as well in words, with Lester’s sardonic smile opposite to him, and Lester’s cultivated voice making sarcastic and unanswerable remarks. Moral courage, as we know, was not Noel’s strong point.

However, it was out of the question that he should show a faint heart in the matter of winning Nora; and besides, what would Nora think of him? So he nerved himself, and went round to the chemist’s shop as usual the second evening after Lester’s arrival.

Lester’s greeting was not encouraging. He held out an impassive hand, said coldly, ‘How do you do, Mr. Dupleix?’ and took no further notice of him.

This lofty treatment set Noel’s back up, and he joined in the conversation in such a manner as to compel Lester to look at him and speak to him, for Lester was never rude, and Noel wished to show him that he was no longer a boy who could be despised and ignored. At last he addressed to him a direct question, asking if he had by chance come across Gronow anywhere.

‘Yes, I did see him not long ago,’ Lester replied.

'And he hopes to get leave too, before long,' added Alice joyfully.

Noel looked at her bright face, and his own lit up in sympathy.

'That will be splendid,' he said heartily.

'There was an early friendship between you, I understand?' observed Lester, voluntarily addressing Noel for the first time.

'Yes, as boys we were great friends,' he replied; 'it was circumstances, not inclination, that parted us.'

'And it seems to have been circumstances, rather than inclination, that brought you together again,' continued Lester.

Noel was not going to be easily aggravated, and he returned good-humouredly:

'It would have been inclination as well, on my part at all events, had I known that Gronow was anywhere near me. I don't believe I have ever thought so much of any other man as I do of him.'

'He is not a man to be overlooked in a crowd, certainly,' agreed Lester in a more amiable tone.

Nora did not show it, but she was really on thorns all this time. Alice, too, felt that the atmosphere was somewhat overcharged, and later in the evening the two women contrived to leave the two men alone. Noel knew that they had done it purposely, and felt bound to avail himself of the opportunity thus offered, however unwelcome the ordeal.

'I have a request to make of you, Mr. Lester,' he began.

'Of me?' replied Lester, with some apparent surprise.

'Yes, a serious one. I am very deeply attached to your daughter, and my request is, that you will give your consent to our engagement.'

He looked frankly in Lester's face, and was somewhat encouraged by the circumstance that the expression on it, though grave, was not sarcastic.

'Since you ask me so straightforwardly,' Lester returned, 'I will answer you as straightforwardly: I cannot give my consent.'

'I may ask your reason?'

'Of course you may, though I do not like giving it. I do not think you are to be trusted with Nora's happiness.'

'On what grounds, Mr. Lester?' asked Noel, keeping calm with a great effort.

'I wonder that you can ask me that,' answered Lester, speaking more sharply.

There was a short silence, and then Noel said quietly :

'I know that my father did you some wrong, though I am not clear what it was, and I deeply regret it; but still, I do not consider it fair that I should be held accountable for my father's faults.'

'Nor am I so unreasonable,' replied Lester; 'I do not hold you accountable for your father's faults, but for your own.'

'I have done—I am doing—my best to repair those faults,' said Noel.

'I am glad to hear it, but that does not alter my opinion.'

'Then your opinion is, that the faults a man commits in his youth must forbid him any chances afterwards.'

'Not at all; I am not forbidding you any chances; I am not, if you will forgive my saying so, considering you very much in this matter; I am considering my daughter's happiness, which I think would not be safe in your keeping.'

Noel bit his lip hard, but he was not going to give up Nora without a further struggle.

'In spite of what you say, Mr. Lester,' he began again, 'I cannot help thinking that the discovery of my parentage has prejudiced you against me.'

'In one sense you are right, and in another wrong,' replied Lester. 'You had not the choice of your parents, undoubtedly; but you will not deny, I suppose, that children are apt to resemble their parents. Your father was—I am sorry to say it to his son—an unprincipled man; your mother, of whom I never knew anything, was a Dutchwoman; by your own account, your uncle is an untruthful, treacherous man. Again forgive me for saying that your own career hitherto would naturally impress an outsider with the idea that you took after your parents.'

Never, until now, had Noel suffered the full penalty of

his past folly ; even at the prison gate his humiliation had not been so bitter.

' You are not an outsider,' he urged, ' you know more than the outward facts, which alone are known to the world.'

' I do,' replied Lester, ' but what I know does not incline me to think that you are a man of firm and reliable character. Why should we continue this conversation, Mr. Dupleix ? It is painful to you, I am sure, and, though you may not believe it, it is painful to me. You have compelled me to say more than I wished to say. Let us leave it now.'

Noel sighed, and moved as if to go ; then, resuming his former position, he said :

' Would you mind telling me in what way my father injured you ?'

' If you really wish to know,' replied Lester, ' he led me on to play for very high stakes with a pack of specially prepared cards.'

' Then—excuse me—but you were also to blame,' said Noel, with a bluntness unusual with him.

' Certainly I was,' returned Lester, without apparent offence, ' and I see what is in your thoughts. You are thinking what sort of a man am I myself, that I pronounce you to be unworthy of my daughter ? Well, I am not a good sort of man, I acknowledge it ; but my daughter happens to be a very good sort of girl, no thanks to me ; and if I am not a good sort of man, yet is that a reason why I should allow her to marry a man who is also not a good sort of man ? '

' I will say no more, Mr. Lester,' observed Noel rising, ' except this, that I fully intend to redeem my character before the world, though I may never do so in your eyes.'

He went out, without waiting for a reply, and Lester lit a fresh cigar.

' Nora will most likely marry him in the end, whether I consent or not,' he reflected, ' that is the worst of it. I wonder how much the little chit cares about him, and how much he has said to her.'

Nora did not appear again that night, but the next morning she went out for a walk with her father.

Lester opened the subject at once.

'I do not know how much I am grieving you, my child,' he said kindly, 'by sending away young Dupleix, but I hope not very seriously.'

'You have sent him away?' Nora asked quietly.

'Yes, I am bound to say he pleaded his cause very well; in fact, all the better because he pleaded so little.'

'Then why do you turn against him?' said Nora. 'You reject him for his father's misdoings, I suppose?'

'Now you are running your head against the same notion that he did,' replied her father; 'it is not at all for his father's misdoings that I reject him, but for his own.'

'He is genuinely sorry for them,' Nora said, still very quiet and composed.

'I do not doubt that he is sorry, and I dare say he will do better, though that is a much more doubtful matter; but even so, neither sorrow nor a certain amount of improvement will make him a man of trustworthy character.'

Nora was silent, and Lester presently said, very gently:

'I am really grieved to give you pain, my girl; but you are very young still, and I am convinced that you will have the opportunity some day of marrying a much better man than Dupleix. I advise you to put him out of your thoughts. Otherwise, when you are of age you will marry him whether I like it or not, eh?'

'I would *much* rather have your consent, father,' Nora answered in a low voice; 'but I will not say that I promise to give Noel up altogether. I will not engage myself to him now.'

'Very well, we will leave it at that,' said Lester, quite satisfied.

He knew that time cures a great many youthful attachments; and even the wisest parents are not always competent to judge whether their son's or their daughter's early passion has the elements of permanence or not.

The next time that Nora met Noel she said to him:

'I will not promise you anything now. We must wait for Gronow.'

'I wish he would come before your father goes back again,' said Noel.

But the days passed and Gronow did not come.

Noel came no more to the chemist's shop while Mr. Lester was there. No one made any remark about his absence, nor was his name mentioned. Nora did not show any sign of being heart-broken ; she was perhaps a little more grave and reserved than was her wont, but that was all.

Noel, on the other hand, went about pale and depressed. It was not only the separation from Nora that was hurting him, it was the deep wound made by Lester's biting words. Hitherto he had been met with such kind indulgence from his friends, the past had been so generously obliterated, that he had not realised the view which an unfriendly and critical outsider might take of his conduct. To the world, then, he appeared as a man of weak character, unreliable, untrustworthy ; no safe guardian of a good woman's happiness. He set the bitter truth plainly before himself, he honestly tried to put himself in Lester's place, and his verdict was that he would have acted in the same manner. Who was he, Noel, to aspire to the possession of a girl like Nora ? What had he to offer her ? Nothing ; not even a blameless reputation before the world. Sometimes he wondered that he had ever had the boldness to ask her, and then again, he remembered that she had told him she loved him, and his heart swelled within him.

Mayer observed his depression, and had not much difficulty in guessing the cause. One day, however, he asked him straight out what was the matter with him, and Noel told him, glad to unburden his breast to this kind friend. He forced himself to repeat a great part of what Lester had said to him, galling as it was.

' Yes, it's very bitter, my lad,' said Mayer sympathetically ; ' but we do suffer terribly for our follies and failings, there's no doubt, and the only remedy is to take our lickings manfully, and do better next time. But as regards this business, I wouldn't be too downcast, if I were you ; I believe it will come all right in the end. That is, if the girl is the right sort, which I believe she is.'

' She might be influenced by her father's view,' sighed Noel.

' She won't if she's fond of you. Women don't reason

about the men they love ; they give them everything they have, and ask no questions.'

'Why have you never married, Mr. Mayer ?' Noel ventured to ask.

'She died,' replied Mayer, and there was an extraordinary pathos in the two simple words as he said them ; 'I was only about your age,' he added, 'but I never seemed to have cared about marrying since. And I have not been lonely, as my two sisters have always stayed with me.'

On one of these days Alice encountered Noel at the Mayers' door, and spoke to him very kindly. She was struck with his altered looks, and reflected how much more he showed what he was feeling than did Nora, who yet did not feel less keenly. She could not forbear saying a word of encouragement to Noel.

'Do not be so downhearted, Mr. Dupleix,' she said, holding out her hand to him, 'I feel sure that Gronow will take your part, and he has a great deal of influence with Mr. Lester.'

'Do you think, Mrs. Neilson,' Noel asked abruptly, 'that Nora owes so much duty to her father ?'

'Honestly, I do not,' replied Alice, 'but I do not like to say so. Nora has always honoured her father in the truest sense of the word. She has always spoken respectfully, both to him and of him, and tried to conceal his faults ; and we must remember that, although he has failed in his duty to her, he has always been kind and affectionate, and she is really fond of him. I should be sorry to see her act in direct opposition to him, and I think we must try every other way first.'

'You are quite right,' agreed Noel, 'and I will have patience.'

Alice felt inclined to put in a word for him herself, and she took an opportunity of saying to her stepfather :

'I think you are rather hard upon Noel.'

'I know I am,' Lester replied readily, 'but I had rather be hard on Noel than on Nora.'

'But is it not hard on Nora, too ?'

'Just at present, perhaps, but I am thinking of her

ultimate happiness. Come now, Alice, tell me honestly, do you think yourself that Noel is the man to make Nora a good, reliable husband, one whom she can look up to and depend upon in the various emergencies of life ?'

'Yes, I do,' Alice replied firmly. 'Noel is not bad or unprincipled, he is only rather easily moulded by his surroundings. Nora has a strong, independent character, perhaps the stronger of the two ; but there are many happy marriages formed in that way ; Noel has had a very severe lesson, and I do not think he would fail her. On the other hand, Nora might be his salvation. Without her, he may drift into an objectless and unworthy life.'

'He may do that with her,' returned Lester, 'and probably will. In any case, I am not concerned about his salvation, but about her happiness. I am afraid I cannot take your view of the question, Alice.'

Alice saw that it was useless to say more just then, and had to fall back upon her faith in Gronow.

Truly, these strong natures create a great responsibility for themselves by the implicit confidence which they inspire in all weaker natures. Being strong, they are able to bear it.

A few days later, Lester returned to his duties. He took a very affectionate leave of his two daughters ; but Noel he did not see again.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

'Thy friend put in thy bosome : wear his eies  
 Still in thy heart, that he may see what's there,  
 If cause require, thou art his sacrifice ;  
 Thy drops of blood must pay down all his fear.'

ONE evening Noel came home from his work in a particularly weary and disheartened frame of mind. There had been a strong south-easter blowing all day, and he had been tramping about miles of docks, which, in a south-easter, are merely a place of torment. He had seen a transport come in, crowded with troops, in the highest spirits and spoiling for a fight ; and the memory of his oath galled him, for he would have liked to go and fight, too, now. He had been on board a dirty cargo boat, and was in consequence a walking monument of dust, smuts, and general discomfort. In short, he was as near to being thoroughly disagreeable as his naturally sweet temper would allow.

As he entered the Mayers' little sitting-room, however, Miss Mayer greeted him with :

'Mrs. Neilson's husband come home. Mrs. Neilson so pleased. Oh my ! how pleased she is !'

'Very fine man,' added Miss Lydia.

Noel's ill-humour vanished like morning mists.

'How pleased I am, too !' he exclaimed. 'Well, I suppose I must not intrude on them the first evening, but I am just longing to see him.'

However, while he was sitting at supper with the Mayers, a boy came from the chemist's, bringing him a note. It was from Alice, telling him that Gronow had arrived, and begging him to come round that evening, if nothing prevented.

If Noel had had fifty other engagements he would have broken them all. In half an hour he was there.

'Well, Gronow !'

'Well, Noel !'

It was with quite a rush of the old childish devotion that Noel returned the strong clasp of his friend's hand—the same hand that had held him as a baby, and guided and supported his first uncertain steps. It was still there, he felt, to guide and support him.

There was but little reference to the past in their talk that evening. A certain reticence seemed to hold them back; and Gronow had so much to tell of his recent experiences, that the hours slipped away like magic.

'And what do you think of your daughter, Gronow?' Noel asked him.

'Oh, I am quite satisfied with her,' Gronow answered, with his slow smile; 'she is not a bit like me.'

'We all think her like Nora,' said Alice.

'Well, that is a very good likeness,' replied Gronow.

Nora seemed very bright and happy that evening, but Noel could scarcely get a word or a look from her. Indeed, she talked very little, and seemed content with listening.

'And how does your present occupation suit you, Noel?' asked Gronow.

Noel laughed.

'It is like the south-easter,' he said; 'that people always tell me is so healthy, and so wholesome; and perhaps it may be.'

They all laughed at this, and Gronow continued:

'When better times come, something pleasant, as well as healthy, may be found.'

'When are these better times coming?' asked Alice, 'they seem to get further away, instead of nearer.'

'Yes, one wants a lot of patience nowadays,' agreed Gronow.

Noel looked at his friend, and thought he had grown much older in the last nine months. There were other lines than those of thought on his brow now, and there was a different expression on his face in repose. It was more mature, yet less stern.

And, in truth, Gronow had learned many lessons during this anxious and perilous year of his life. He had not, like Noel, experienced the shock of sudden calamity and down-

fall ; but in long hours of watching, and weariness, that overpowered even his iron frame ; in the painful separation from his wife and children, who had never been absent from his side before ; in the knowledge of new responsibilities, and a different kind of life, making new demands upon his powers ; in the intimate intercourse of common danger and hardship with men of all sorts and characters—his mind expanded, fresh ideas and ways of looking at men and things came to him ; he learned the real value of emotion and impulse, when wisely used, and not abused ; and he became aware of weaknesses and deficiencies in his own nature which had not been apparent to him before. War is not of necessity a hardening experience ; a noble character is more likely to be softened by it.

When Noel at length rose to take his leave, Alice observed :

‘To-morrow is Saturday ; let us all go out somewhere in the afternoon, perhaps the Mayers will come too.’

‘I will ask them,’ said Noel.

On the following afternoon, accordingly, they all went out, a quietly happy party, to see the camp at Wynberg, and to roam about that beautiful suburb.

Baby was mostly carried on her father’s strong arm, the perambulator being dispensed with ; and Gronow junior attached himself to Mr. Mayer, with whom he had struck up a warm, if somewhat unequal friendship.

‘I don’t seem to have any children to-day,’ Alice observed, laughing ; ‘they have deserted their mother for new lights.’

‘You will have enough of them, never fear, before you have done with them,’ said Gronow.

‘For shame, Gronow ! As if I should ever have done with them ! But they will soon return to the old light when they get tired.’

In the course of their wanderings they came to a soldiers’ graveyard, which gave their thoughts a sober turn. Few, indeed, were buried here compared to those who lay where they had fallen.

‘Oh, this is a land of graves !’ Alice said at length.

'I wonder if there is any other country in the world where so many brave men lie buried!'

'No other, I should think,' replied her husband, 'where so many have been buried in recent years.'

A large walking party has a tendency to break up into twos and threes, and so it was with this one. Nora had taken possession of baby, and was walking between Miss Mayer and her sister; little Gronow skipped along holding a hand of his mother on one side and of Mr. Mayer on the other; it therefore followed that Gronow and Noel were left together, and they fell somewhat behind the rest. Noel saw an opportunity to open his heart.

'Gronow,' he began, 'has Alice said anything to you about——' he hesitated.

'About you and Nora?' Gronow filled up the sentence. 'Yes, she told me about it last night, after you had gone. Is it a serious matter, Noel?'

'It is with me,' Noel replied very quietly.

'It is with Nora, if she has said so,' Gronow observed. 'Nora is not the sort of girl to take a passing fancy. It is once for all with her.'

'You know that Mr. Lester absolutely refuses his consent?'

'Yes, and I cannot be surprised at it, however sorry for it. Let us be quite plain with one another, Noel. I should not, in his place, refuse absolutely; but I think that, considering the circumstances, you ought to submit to a long probation.'

'I would cheerfully submit to it,' replied Noel, 'but Mr. Lester's refusal was unconditional.'

'Yes, I think that is unnecessarily hard. Probably, although he may deny it, he is more or less prejudiced.'

'I am sure of it,' said Noel; and then, after a pause, 'Do you consider that Lester has the same claim on his daughter's obedience that a good father would have?'

'No, of course I don't,' answered Gronow, 'but we cannot ignore his wishes altogether. He is her father, and, until she comes of age, her legal guardian.'

'I know you are right,' Noel admitted mournfully.

'But that need not discourage you altogether,' continued Gronow. 'When I go back I will try to see Lester myself. I am going to Bloemfontein, and he is likely to be there. I have obtained many a concession from him before now, and I will try to obtain this one. Lester is a man that you can do a good deal with if you know how to take him.'

'I evidently do not know how to take him, then,' returned Noel. 'I just tried to be straightforward and make no fuss, but it did not answer.'

'Ah well, you were handicapped,' remarked Gronow. 'I shall have a much better chance.'

'You are an ideal friend, Gronow,' said Noel gratefully.

'And meanwhile, I am afraid you must be content to wait,' concluded Gronow.

'I shall be more content now.'

Noel spent the rest of the evening with his friends after they returned home, but he was rather silent and thoughtful. When Alice was putting the children to bed, and he and Gronow were sitting together in that delightful intimacy of silence, Nora also being in the room with some work, Noel suddenly remarked :

'I suppose my oath altogether precludes my fighting, even on the English side?'

'Do you want to fight?' asked Gronow.

'I feel as if I should like to volunteer now; and there is a lot of recruiting going on.'

'Yes, volunteers are being called for everywhere. Well, as a matter of fact, you would not break either the letter or the spirit of your oath by volunteering.'

'Not the spirit, I understand, because it meant, of course, that I would not fight on the Dutch side—but the letter?'

'It was Noel Johnson who took the oath, but it would be Noel Dupleix who would volunteer.'

'But that is a subterfuge.'

'Yes, of course. And if it were found out you would get into worse trouble. But I think something might be done to release you from your oath.'

'I am afraid none of the authorities will trust me now,' sighed Noel, 'I could not expect it.'

'There would be difficulty, certainly,' observed Gronow, 'but if you really wish it, I will see what can be done.'

'You are undertaking more wonders for me than you will be able to accomplish,' said Noel smiling.

'That is quite possible,' replied Gronow, 'but one can always try.'

Noel had looked at Nora two or three times during this conversation, but she had not once raised her head, which was steadily bent down over her work. She never gave him an opportunity of speaking to her alone now.

The few days of Gronow's visit passed all too quickly. To Alice the second parting seemed almost worse than the first.

'My darling husband,' she said to him the night before he left, 'when will this terrible war be over? Have you not served long enough now? Couldn't they fill your place?'

'They could fill my place, sweetheart, but I don't think I ought to leave it empty. Besides, I cannot go back to my own work, and I certainly cannot be idle. However, comfort yourself with this: I am going to try for a berth in the Intelligence Department, or something that will not involve fighting, of which I think I have had my fair share.'

'I am sure you have,' replied his wife. 'I wonder,' she added, 'what sort of a condition our little home is in!'

'It was not damaged when last I heard,' answered Gronow; 'young Mayer wrote to me when he was in Johannesburg. He went to see it.'

'There does not seem to be much prospect of returning to it yet.'

'No, there does not,' Gronow admitted; 'but, dear wife, how much better off we are than many others. For instance, I know a poor fellow up there who sent his wife down to her people in Cradock. She had a little son, but he died, and the baby too; and he never knew of it till four months afterwards.'

'Oh yes, yes, I know,' exclaimed Alice, 'I have been to see so many of these poor refugees here. They are living

on charity, respectable people who never dreamed of such a thing in their lives ; and some of these women have not heard of their husbands for months, and do not know whether they are alive or dead.'

'So we must not grumble,' said her husband.

'No, indeed. And if I know that your life is not in constant danger I shall be more than satisfied.'

The parting was a hard wrench, nevertheless, and Gronow left some very sore hearts behind him ; not sorer, perhaps, than the one which he carried away with him, hidden by an immovable countenance.

Noel did not stay away from the chemist's shop after Gronow's visit. He did not go there quite so often as of yore, but he went, and was always welcome. There was a certain constraint between himself and Nora, but it did not make them altogether unhappy. They both felt that they were waiting, and they both had confidence that waiting would bring its reward.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

'It is sometimes a hard matter to be certain whether men do wrong, for their actions often are done with a reference to circumstances ; and one must be thoroughly informed of a great many things before he can be rightly qualified to give judgment in the case.'

IT was about a fortnight later that Gronow, encountering Lester in the streets of Bloemfontein, promptly carried him off to his own quarters for a little conversation.

'Of course I know what you want to talk about,' said Lester, rather irritably, 'but what is the use ? I have surely heard everything that can be said in favour of Noel, and I have surely made it quite clear why I refused his request. What is to be gained by going all through it again ?'

'I think perhaps I have something to say for Noel, that no one else has said—that he certainly would not say himself,' was Gronow's reply.

'Well, let me hear it, then,' said Lester resignedly, as he lit his cigar ; 'one thing I know, if you have made up your mind that I am to listen to you, I have no choice about it.'

He said this good-humouredly enough, as he seated himself opposite to Gronow ; and Gronow, looking at him, reflected how much the man had improved during the last year. He looked bronzed and healthy, his eye was bright, his expression alert and interested, his whole bearing manly and vigorous. Here was another case in which the experiences of war had brought out good qualities rather than bad.

'In the first place, then,' began Gronow, 'did you know that Noel concealed his real name when he heard that the most of Miss Lanyon's money was gone, because he would not claim the half of Nora's diminished fortune ? That seems to me generous.'

'It may be so,' returned Lester, 'but you will observe that he does not lose anything by marrying her.'

'He had no thought of marrying her at the time.'

'How do you know that he had not? I have a suspicion that he had some such thought; but at the same time he thought he also had a chance with his cousin Hester, who probably had a nice little dowry of her own too; and in trying to make up his mind which chance to grasp at first, he lost his balance, and had a bad fall.'

'And having fallen you take the opportunity of plastering him with as much mud as possible,' observed Gronow.

'I take the view of his conduct that I imagine most men of the world would take,' returned Lester indifferently. 'I may be wrong, but I am much more likely to be right.'

'I think you are wrong, however,' Gronow replied patiently; 'it is always easy to set down human nature as bad and to find low motives for every doubtful action. It is much harder to find out a man's real character, and to take all his circumstances into consideration. Few people will take the trouble to do that.'

'Since you presumably have done it, however,' said Lester, 'let us hear the result.'

'Noel is not unprincipled,' continued Gronow; 'in the matter of that despatch, for instance, he was undoubtedly deceived entirely.'

'Wait a moment,' interrupted Lester; 'if you are under the impression that I bear a grudge against Noel because he was very near, unconsciously, setting an ambush for me, you are quite mistaken; I have no such feeling, and never had.'

'I know that,' replied Gronow, 'I never suspected you of anything so petty. Nor did Noel, evidently, for it never seems to have entered his mind.'

'No, it does not,' agreed Lester.

'And does not that go to show that he is not petty himself?'

'Perhaps so,' allowed Lester; 'however, I never said that Noel was unprincipled. I think him simply a flabby, back-

boneless, shilly-shallying fellow, whom I don't want for a son-in-law.'

'But if he was really vacillating between two women with the idea of securing a fortune he is unprincipled,' said Gronow.

'Granting that, how else do you account for his behaviour to his cousin, when he was already, it appears, attracted by Nora?'

'He may have been attracted by Nora, but he had no thought of ever being in a position to marry her. His cousin had led him on a great deal, there can be hardly any doubt of that; and she was inexcusable, because she was already engaged; but he, feeling that he had given her reason to expect it, did what was right and honourable in asking her father for her hand.'

'Allowing all that,' returned Lester, 'and putting the most favourable construction possible on all Noel's actions, I still ask you, what sort of a man is he who will behave as he has done?'

'A man with faults and weaknesses, as we all have,' replied Gronow. 'Noel's sins have been youthful follies, great follies perhaps, but neither vices nor crimes. And I do not think that it is for you to be too hard on the failings of youth.'

'Now you are falling back on Noel's argument,' said Lester, 'which is not worthy of you, Gronow. Because I have not been a good man myself, therefore I should be willing to let my daughter marry a man who is not—well, not satisfactory.'

'I did not say that, Mr. Lester. I said that you ought to be able to make allowance for the errors of youth, which may become the guide-posts of manhood. You did not hesitate to marry a good woman yourself. Was her happiness less dear to you than your daughter's?'

Lester was silent, and Gronow presently continued:

'Then there is Nora to be considered.'

'There is only Nora to be considered as far as I am concerned,' Lester responded rather sharply. 'I am not actuated, as you all seem to think, by hatred of Noel, but by

a genuine desire—a *genuine* desire,' he repeated with emphasis, 'for Nora's happiness.'

'I quite believe it,' Gronow answered readily, 'but are you sure that you are securing Nora's happiness? Nora is not superficial, and she is too proud to confess easily to an attachment. I think the attachment she confesses to must be strong and lasting.'

'If you are right, that is a more serious question,' said Lester. 'As a matter of fact, I suppose you think I have no right to interfere with Nora at all.'

'No, I do not think that,' returned Gronow slowly.

'Then what do you think? You may as well say it while you are about it.'

Gronow looked across at him with something approaching to a smile.

'I once read somewhere,' he said, 'that every right has its origin in a duty fulfilled. I suppose that a man who wants to claim all the rights of a parent should have fulfilled all the duties of one.'

'Very neatly put,' replied Lester, 'and I acknowledge the force of the application. Really, one can listen to a man like you, who will talk common sense. And am I to understand, then, that you would advise Nora to marry without my consent?'

'Certainly not,' replied Gronow; 'on the contrary, I told Noel that it would be wrong to ignore your wishes. If not, why should I have taken all this trouble to argue with you to-day?'

'I can't say,' replied Lester, smiling, 'and so the upshot of all this is, that you think I ought to give them my blessing at once, and have done with it.'

'Not that,' said Gronow. 'I told Noel that he ought to submit to a long probation.'

'You are too wise for this world, Gronow,' observed Lester. 'If only we lived in patriarchal times, I should be well content to give you Nora too, on the same principle that Jacob had Leah and Rachel.'

'Thank you, I am quite satisfied with one,' laughed Gronow; 'Nora is a first-rate sister, and I want Noel for a

brother. You know, Mr. Lester, although you will not own it, I think the knowledge of Noel's parentage has prejudiced you against him.'

'Not on account of the personal injury I received,' answered Lester quietly, 'but because I think he somewhat resembles his father in character, though not at all in features. However, let that pass. Suppose I say that I give my consent to this marriage, provided that they both continue in the same mind, and that Noel proves himself worthy for five years. Noel will then be about eight and twenty, I believe, and Nora about four and twenty, which is quite soon enough to marry, in any case. What do you say?'

'I think you are perfectly right,' said Gronow; 'in this case five years is quite a reasonable probation. And I am very much obliged to you for listening to me so patiently.'

'And for giving in to your confounded obstinacy,' added Lester, laughing. 'I don't know how it is you are not completely spoiled, for you get your own way in everything.'

'Don't you believe it,' replied Gronow good-humouredly as he rose. 'I have to go out now. Will you write to Nora?'

'Yes, I will, and you can write to Noel.'

Accordingly, about a week later, Nora received the following epistle from her father:

'My dear Nora,—Gronow has worked the oracle, and got his own way, as he always does. He has endorsed my proposal, which is, that you and Noel should wait and have patience for five years. This will prove the constancy of both and the reality of the amendment which Noel has promised, and will find you both young at the end of your probation.

'I should like you to feel, if you can, that my only wish all along has been to secure your happiness; and if I yield now, it is because I think your attachment is a serious one. Time will show if I am right.'

'For the rest, I have come to the conclusion that life is so uncertain, especially just now, that it is hardly worth while to make any part of it miserable for any one. It may chance,

long before the five years are over, that I may be nothing more to you than a fast-receding memory.

'Good-bye, my dear child. Much love to yourself, Alice, and her chicks, from your affectionate father,

'GERALD LESTER.'

Nora showed this letter to Alice in silence, and when Alice kissed her, and whispered, 'I am *so* glad, dear,' she laid her head on her sister's shoulder, and said wistfully:

'Alice, I think there is a lot of good in father, don't you?'

'I always have thought so,' Alice replied truthfully, 'and I think so more than ever now, because he has come out splendidly during this dreadful war-time.'

'I wish he had not put in that last sentence,' observed Nora, as she took the letter again. 'How very good Gronow is! I don't think anyone can be just like him.'

'Don't say that to Noel,' replied Alice, laughing and retreating.

The next day Noel appeared, radiant. Alice chanced to be down in the shop making a purchase when he came in.

She held out her hand to him with a congratulatory smile.

'You have heard from Gronow?' she asked.

'Yes, that he has added another height to my mountain of debt. I have only one regret.'

'What is that?' asked Alice.

'That Mr. Lester did not write to me himself. I feel that, although he has yielded to Gronow—and Nora—he does not like me any better than he did before.'

Alice could not contradict him, for she knew that he was right.

'You do not rebel against his terms, however?' she asked.

'Not in the least. I never should have done so.'

'Nora is upstairs,' suggested Alice by way of consolation.

She contrived to linger in the shop for some time, and when at last she went upstairs, she made a good deal more commotion over it than she usually did, being naturally quiet in her movements.

Noel and Nora, however, had not needed many protestations.

Noel went in, and said quietly :

' Then there is nothing between us now, Nora ? '

And Nora replied :

' Not unless we make anything, Noel.'

After that she allowed him to kiss her again, and they sat together in profound contentment. Presently Noel said :

' Darling, if Gronow is able to get me released from my oath, shall I volunteer or not? Would you rather I stayed ?'

Nora looked steadily into his eyes.

' No,' she said, ' I would rather you went. Of course it is hard, and painful ; but I think every strong, able man ought to go and fight for his country in this time of need.'

' I am glad you say that,' Noel replied gravely, ' because if I get the chance I mean to go.'

And then Nora suddenly clung round his neck, and said :

' But you must not think I don't mind, Noel ! '

There is no need to record Noel's answer to this.

And about three weeks later, Noel received a sudden summons from Gronow in six brief words :

' Arranged your enrolment. Come at once.'

A pass was enclosed to Bloemfontein.

In this way Noel and Nora began their five years' probation.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

'Let your fate be your only inclination, for there is nothing more reasonable.'

'It is part of the business of life to leave it, and here too it suffices to manage the present well.'

THERE was a faint dawn of twilight in the eastern sky. It grew from pearly grey to pink, from pink to rose and orange. Orion and the Southern Cross paled and faded: the morning star, glowing like a little moon, paled in its turn. The stern, bare outlines of the stony kopjes cut the clear darkness of the western heavens in weird, fantastic shapes; the higher mountains still slept in folds of mist. The 'fresh breathing of to-morrow' crept far and wide across the desolate veldt.

Lester was riding alone along a solitary road. No human habitation, no human being, was in sight; no living thing seemed to be near him save the wild creatures of the veldt. The twilight heaven formed an infinite dome over his head; the untenanted earth an infinite floor beneath his feet.

He had been riding a good part of the night, and was looking out sharply for any sign of water. He was the bearer of important messages, but he was unarmed, and carried no papers of any description.

Presently he drew rein and paused, in a listening attitude. The whole air was filled with a vibration, a sound it could not be called, which was felt, not heard. It came two or three times, at intervals of about a minute. 'Firing,' said Lester to himself, 'I wonder where that is. Twenty miles away, or more, I should say. I wish I were there.'

He rode on again, and the silence brightened around him. He was facing eastward, and the exquisite blending of the sunrise tints brought a keen pleasure to his cultivated eye. Perhaps they brought something better, too. There is a

purifying influence in the light and the breath of a new morning ; and the reckless, cynical gambler may have felt some regrets, not wholly vain, for the wasted years and the wasted powers which had passed irrevocably beyond his reach. Some of the waste he had striven during the last year to repair. He had performed his duty thoroughly, conscientiously, minutely, to his country and his Government, as, perhaps, he had never performed a duty to anyone before. Patriotism is a passion that sometimes seems to outlive all other natural affections, and to become a man's strongest passion when he has passed the heyday of youth.

A group of low kopjes lay in front of him, on his right, the road passing within a few yards of them. As he approached the first of them, three men on horseback rode out from behind it and placed themselves in the road.

' Dutchmen,' thought Lester, ' I wonder if I can pass myself off as their countryman.'

They levelled their guns at him, and told him to hold up his hands, which he did. They came up to him, and made him dismount.

' Why this is the man I have been seeking for a year,' said one of them,

' No go,' thought Lester, ' I am recognised.' Aloud he said, ' You have been singularly unfortunate then, or singularly unskilful, for I have not been in hiding.'

His captors having their backs to the east, and the light being still faint, he did not see their features plainly ; but when the man who had recognised him turned, so that the dawn fell on his face, Lester knew him at once.

' Oh, Mr. Botha, good morning,' he said politely, ' it is a long time since we met.'

' It may be longer before we meet again,' replied Botha in a rather surly tone.

' I trust so,' returned Lester, whose intensely alert expression was quite at variance with his cool, indifferent manner.

' I want some information from you,' continued Botha, ' which I know you can give me. And the sooner you give it the better for you.'

'My information,' answered Lester, in his most suave tones, 'is not exactly what you call available. Even if you blow my brains out, which you seem inclined to do, that will not enable you, I fear, to possess yourself of their contents.'

Botha made a sign to the two men who were with him. They took Lester to a large upright boulder, to which they bound him fast with leathern straps. They then searched him thoroughly, but found nothing.

'I see you have no papers,' Botha said to him, 'but there is no doubt you can tell me what I want to know. If you will answer all my questions without reserve I will let you go. If not, I will shoot you.'

All the manhood that was in Lester asserted itself at this threat. He could not move, but he turned on Botha his handsome features, blazing with indignation.

'You damned scoundrel!' he said fiercely, 'do you take me for another such treacherous hound as yourself? Shoot me if you will, but don't insult me.'

Botha spoke for a minute or two with his companions, who appeared to remonstrate with him. After a short conversation, however, they unbound Lester, only tying his hands behind him, and setting him with his back against the rock. Botha stood opposite to him, and took deliberate aim.

'You will tell me nothing?' he asked once more.

Lester made no reply. He looked straight along the muzzle of the gun that was pointed at him with a steady eye, and a faint, contemptuous smile.

He was yet smiling when the shot rang out on the clear, still air; and when they looked down upon him, as he lay at their feet, they saw by the first ray of sunlight, which made a glory about him, that the smile, unchanged by death, was still on his face.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

CONST. 'O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth,  
Then with a passion would I shake the world ;  
And rouse from sleep that fell anatomy,  
Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice,  
Which scorns a modern invocation.'

PAND. 'Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow.'

'ANOTHER instance of Boer treachery.

'A dastardly outrage has been committed by three Boers, in the neighbourhood of Naauwpoort, on an Englishman named Lester. Lester was riding despatches for the Commandant at Naauwpoort, but carried neither arms nor papers. He was held up some twenty-five miles from Naauwpoort early on Thursday morning, and despite the fact of his riding unarmed, the Boers, enraged at getting no information from him, bound him, set him against a rock, and shot him dead on the spot. The occurrence was witnessed by a native who was hiding amongst the rocks, and he brought the news into Naauwpoort later in the day. A party of men was sent out, who found the body lying on the spot as described, the hands bound behind, and a bullet wound through the heart. They brought the body into Naauwpoort, where it was buried. One of the three Boers is a well-known colonial rebel, Cornelius Botha, from the district of Colesberg. The authorities have long been on the look-out for him, and now hot search is being made for him and his two companions.'

This paragraph in one of the Cape newspapers was the first intimation that Nora had of her father's death ; but a few days later she received a formal announcement from the military authorities at Naauwpoort, to which were added a few brief words highly commending Lester's courage and sagacity, and lamenting the loss of his valuable services to the Government.

Alice was at first alarmed at the effect of this blow on her sister. Nora had always been a very one-sided partisan throughout the war, and very bitter against the Dutch, with whom she had never been able to get on well all the years she had lived in the Colony. It was a sufficient proof of the strength of her affection for Noel, that she could ignore the fact of his having Dutch blood in his veins ; but she did not like to be reminded of it, and always declared vehemently that he showed no sign of it, which was true.

On the other hand, Nora was very fond of her father, in spite of his lapses of conduct, and during the past year the attachment between them had strengthened perceptibly. Alice shared this feeling, for her respect for her stepfather had increased greatly since he had shown himself so much more of a man ; and with her respect, her affection. And now his death had magnified him into a hero ; it shed a halo of glory round his memory, and showed up in the blackest colours his murderers, for Nora would allow them no other name.

Nora seemed quite beside herself. She neither ate nor slept, she was either sunk in apathy or boiling over with rage ; she would not admit that a single good word could be said for any Dutchman living.

It happened, unfortunately enough, that Mr. Van der Merwe called one morning to offer his sincere sympathy ; Nora was in the room, and she turned upon him like a young tigress :

‘ You are all false, and treacherous, and cowardly, you Dutch, every one of you ! ’ she cried ; ‘ everything that is base and vile in human nature is in your nature, you Dutch ! I will never call one of you my friend as long as I live ! ’

She went into the next room, and fastened the door.

Poor old Van der Merwe, who, in spite of natural sympathies with his countrymen, had behaved throughout the war as a most inoffensive British subject, was deeply hurt by this outburst ; but he was much too kind-hearted to resent it, making every allowance for Nora’s poignant grief.

‘ I do assure you, Mrs. Neilson,’ he said, ‘ that I have

many good friends among your people ; no one regrets this terrible war more than I do ; and when my countrymen commit shameful deeds like this one my heart is sorely ashamed.'

' You must try to forgive Nora, Mr. Van der Merwe,' replied Alice, who was also very much hurt by her sister's want of courtesy and self-control ; ' she has been almost beside herself since she heard of her father's death ; but it was very wrong of her to speak to you like that, and I shall tell her so.'

' Oh no, no, do not vex her,' said the kind-hearted old Dutchman ; ' she has a very sore heart, poor child, and I cannot wonder at it. By-and-bye she will see things differently.'

He presently took his leave, and Alice sat thoughtful for a minute. Hitherto she had tried to coax and persuade her sister, but now she determined to try a little wholesome severity.

She went to the door and knocked. ' Nora, open the door, please.'

Nora came and opened it, and Alice went in.

' Nora, you must not go on like this any more. I will not allow it. You must really exercise some control over your feelings. It is unpardonable that you should insult visitors who come to the house. Mr. Van der Merwe has never done you any harm, and he has never said a word against the English. He was very much wounded by your rudeness, and yet he spoke so kindly and sympathetically of you afterwards. If all English people went on as you do there would be no chance of any peace or friendship ever again in this country. Gronow would be very angry if he heard you, and I am sure that your father himself would have been the last man to be so bitter and unjust towards his enemies. He always spoke so fairly and reasonably about them.'

Nora listened in perfect silence to this little homily, which it cost Alice a great effort to deliver ; then she turned away from her sister, and burst into a passion of tears. Alice took her in her arms and soothed her.

'Alice, you are right, quite right, but I have been feeling so horrid!' sobbed Nora; 'it was just as if I was someone else, not myself at all. And every time I thought of father, it seemed as if I *couldn't* bear it!'

'So many others have had to bear it, dear.'

'But not that. If he had been killed in fair fight it would not have been half so bad.'

'No, of course it would not. But many others have been killed treacherously—under the white flag, for instance. And Englishmen are treacherous sometimes. If a Dutchman came to you and abused the whole English nation because one Englishman had behaved treacherously, you would not make much excuse for him.'

'I will not do it again,' said Nora.

'It is very childish, too, Nora,' continued Alice, pressing the lesson home, now that she had wound herself up to do it, 'not like a sensible, grown-up woman. What would Noel think of you?'

'He would be ashamed of me,' replied Nora candidly, 'as I am of myself now. I will write and tell him all about it. I wonder if he has heard of it. I am afraid he will feel very bad, because—'

'Yes, because it was his uncle who did it,' said Alice, guessing the thought in her sister's mind, 'but you will tell him that makes no difference to us at all?'

'Yes, of course I will.'

'And, Nora, you must apologise to Mr. Van de Merwe.'

'I will do it to-day,' replied Nora, always impetuous.

The same afternoon accordingly she presented herself at Van der Merwe's house, and said without preface:

'Mr. Van der Merwe, I am very sorry for the way I spoke to you this morning. It was rude and unladylike, and what I said was quite untrue, besides. Please forgive me, if you can.'

'My dear young lady,' replied the old Dutchman, taking her hand in both of his, 'there is nothing to forgive. I feel for your trouble very much, and I am very much grieved and ashamed for my countrymen, who have done this thing.'

Nora did not keep her word, for she and old Mr. Van der Merwe were fast friends from that day forth.

Before Nora could write to Noel she received a short note from him, dated from Naauwpoort.

'Nora, darling,' he wrote, 'we have been quartered here for a few days, but are off again to-morrow. I made a little wooden cross, and set it up over your father's grave, and I just put his name and the date on it, nothing else. It seems as if fate were determined to try to make me hateful to you ; but, dearest, I do not own that traitor as any relation of mine. He is my uncle by blood ; I deplore it, I cannot help it ; but I will never again have any intercourse with him or with any of his family. They are the greatest strangers on earth to me.'

'If I could only tell you how my heart aches for you, and how I just burn to be with you, if only for one day !'

Nora wrote back in a wonderfully softened vein :

'Dear Noel,—How good of you to attend to father's grave ! I hope I shall see it some day. Do not talk about fate coming between us, dear. There is no fate for me except my love for you, and nothing can alter that.'

'And, Noel, do not let yourself get bitter. I did that, and it made me so miserable, I was almost out of my mind.'

'I was dreadfully rude to Mr. Van der Merwe, and then Alice talked to me and made me ashamed of myself, and I went and made it up with him.'

'Perhaps that poor girl Hester may be just as miserable. I know how much worse I should have felt if my father and hers had changed places. You must not be too hard on her.'

This was a characteristic outburst of generosity on Nora's part, for at one time she had certainly been a little bit jealous of Hester Botha.

About the same time also Nora received a kind, brotherly letter from Gronow, in which he took pains to repeat to her all the praise of her father which he had heard from different sources, and told her how popular he had been with both his comrades and his superiors, and how many risks he had run, and brave deeds he had performed, which the world would never hear of.

And so it came to pass that after all his weakness and wandering, his many falls, and his misspent years, yet Gerald Lester rested in an honoured grave. Truly, it might be said of him, as of a better-known man, that 'nothing in his life became him like the leaving it.'

## CHAPTER XL

'Do not return the temper of ill-natured people upon themselves, nor treat them as they do the rest of mankind.'

'You will be fully convinced that the opinion of such mortals is not worth one troublesome thought.'

ONE day, about three weeks later than the events just recorded, Alice had gone to see the Mayers, taking the children with her, while Nora, having a slight headache, had remained at home alone. As she sat by the open window, reading, a boy came up from below, bringing her a card. A lady, he said, was downstairs asking to see her.

Nora took the card, and read with some perplexity the name, 'Miss Calthrop,' and underneath, written in pencil, 'requests the favour of a few minutes' conversation with Miss Lester.'

'Show her up,' said Nora, adding to herself, 'where have I heard the name Calthrop before?' Noel had mentioned it to her, in telling her of his early life, but that she did not at the moment recall.

A small, elderly, birdlike lady, very neatly dressed in grey, bowed herself into the room.

'Excuse the liberty, Miss Lester,' she said, in a rather nervous manner; 'I come on business of a private nature.'

'Please sit down,' said Nora, polite but puzzled. 'What can I do for you?'

Miss Calthrop seated herself and began:

'I was for many years the friend and companion of the late lamented Miss Lanyon.'

As she rolled all the l's off her tongue, Nora remembered in a flash who she was.

'Yes, I have heard your name mentioned,' she replied.

Miss Calthrop looked somewhat surprised at this, but continued:

'I have no doubt you have been made acquainted with

the various circumstances connected with Miss Lanyon's death and her—very unexpected—will.'

'I heard that she was supposed to be not quite in her right mind, and to have destroyed another will, if that is what you mean,' replied Nora.

'Yes, and that she disinherited a boy whom she had brought up as her own son, and who naturally expected to be her heir.'

'I know that too,' assented Nora.

'I may also say, Miss Lester,' continued Miss Calthrop, 'that I had a claim on Miss Lanyon which was entirely disregarded. I was like a sister to her, and she had practically promised to leave me well provided for.'

'Indeed!' returned Nora rather coldly, and the thought suddenly came into her mind, was this a case of blackmailing? Could this well-dressed, ladylike-looking person want to get money from her? She put away the thought as absurd, yet she wished that Alice would come in.

'However, Miss Lester, I am taking up your time, and must explain my immediate business. Shortly before her death, Miss Lanyon, for what reason I do not know, gave into my charge a desk full of old letters. She told me that she would leave it to my judgment whether to keep or to destroy them. After her death I looked them through, and finding that most of them were of no interest, I destroyed them. There was one packet, however, that seemed to be of importance, and I kept them, though I found it very difficult to decide what ought to be done with them. They are letters from your father to Miss Lanyon.'

'From my father?' exclaimed Nora.

'Yes; and their importance lies in the fact that they explain the otherwise unaccountable circumstance of her leaving all her property to you.'

'The explanation of that,' said Nora, who was beginning to be on her guard, 'was, that my father had been injured by Miss Lanyon's nephew, and that Miss Lanyon had an idea—exaggerated by her weakness of mind—of compensation.'

'Miss Lanyon was not weak in her mind when she

made that will in your favour,' observed Miss Calthrop; 'it was made when you were a baby.'

'But I understood,' said Nora doubtfully, 'that she had invalidated it with a later will, which she destroyed in aberration of mind.'

'True, but why did she make the first will? That is what these letters explain.'

'Have you the letters here?' asked Nora.

'Yes,' replied Miss Calthrop, touching a little black bag that she carried.

'I think if they are my father's,' said Nora, 'that I have more right to them than anyone else. Why did you not return them to him after Miss Lanyon's death? That seems to me the simplest thing to have done.'

'Perhaps I ought to have done so; but I have not yet finished my explanation,' returned Miss Calthrop.

'Pray do so, then,' said Nora, getting impatient.

'I blame myself, Miss Lester,' Miss Calthrop recommenced with a great show of frankness. 'I blame myself, as I dare say you will blame me, for having kept these letters in my hands for three years, and yet I did not know what else to do with them. I thought of handing them over to Mr. Abdy, who knew nothing about them, but I was afraid to do so. I thought of sending them to you, but I did not like trusting them to the post. I thought of destroying them, but that did not seem right. Finally, I kept them, thinking to wait till some chance turned up, or some good idea occurred to me. Time slipped away, and I forgot them partly; then suddenly the opportunity I had waited for came. A young lady of my acquaintance was ordered to take a voyage for her health, and required a chaperon; she asked me, and when I heard that she was coming to Capetown I immediately thought of the letters. I obtained your address from Mr. Abdy, and have taken the liberty of calling on you.'

Nora had listened attentively to this speech, and had fastened upon the sentence in it that most struck her.

'Why do you say,' she asked quietly, 'that you were afraid to show the letters to Mr. Abdy?'

'It is with great reluctance I tell you,' Miss Calthrop replied, 'but the fact is that these letters, which were written, of course, many years ago, are—well, are not very creditable—to your father.'

'Not creditable?' said Nora, growing rather pale.

'Not creditable,' repeated Miss Calthrop firmly; 'indeed, I almost feared that they might give Mr. Abdy some reason to think that you had not come into your inheritance by fair means.'

Nora was somewhat staggered by this suggestion; but after a moment's reflection she was quick enough to see a flaw in it.

'If you really thought that, Miss Calthrop,' she said severely, 'it was exceedingly wrong of you to keep back such important information. You cannot suppose that I should wish to enjoy an inheritance which is not fairly mine. If there is even the faintest likelihood of that, I shall think it my duty to write to Mr. Abdy myself, and tell him what you say about these letters.'

'But, my dear Miss Lester, your father,' remonstrated Miss Calthrop, 'and your father's name!'

Nora turned upon her a very bright pair of eyes.

'My father's name, Miss Calthrop,' she replied slowly, 'is in no need of consideration from you or me. My father is dead. He served his country like a hero, and he died a hero's death. His name is spoken only with praise and with reverence by everyone who knew him out here.'

Miss Calthrop was evidently thrown out of her course by this information. A person may hesitate to cast aspersions on the dead who will have little conscience about slandering the living. But Nora had other bolts in store. She guessed that Miss Calthrop wanted money, and was not actuated by any particular spite against herself. So she said:

'There are other circumstances of which you do not seem to be aware. Did you know that the greater part of Miss Lanyon's fortune was fraudulently made away with by Mr. Abdy's partner?'

'No, I have not heard of it,' replied Miss Calthrop, evidently surprised.

'Some of it has been recovered,' continued Nora, 'and, eventually, Mr. Abdy hopes that as much as half of it may be recovered.'

'Indeed,' murmured Miss Calthrop, quite at a loss for words.

'So that whoever ought to have it,' Nora went on gravely, 'must be content with a much diminished fortune.'

'Oh, I never said that you ought not to have it, Miss Lester,' Miss Calthrop interposed hastily; 'as for that unfortunate boy Noel, I do not in the least know what became of him.'

'I do,' replied Nora, 'I know all about him.'

'Indeed!' and Miss Calthrop collapsed again.

'He is at the front just now,' Nora continued; 'but I have known him for a long time. By a very strange series of events, which I need not relate to you, he was discovered to be the son of Christian Dupleix.'

This time Miss Calthrop was absolutely thunderstruck.

She remained speechless, while Nora, who rather enjoyed the effect she was producing, proceeded:

'Mr. Abdy could have told you that, had you asked him; for, of course, he knows all about it. So that, after all, Mr. Dupleix is the real heir; the half of the property is, in any case, his; and as I am going to marry him, it will not make much difference if he takes the whole.'

'You are going to marry him?' gasped Miss Calthrop.

'Yes; and now Miss Calthrop, let us return to the subject of the letters. I suppose your real object in coming here is to get money. I have no power to give you money myself, because I am still under age, and I would not do so in any case. You can do yourself no good, and me no harm, by showing these letters to anyone. If you will give them to me, I will consult Mr. Dupleix as to whether you really have any claim on the estate or not. If you will not give them to me, I shall write to Mr. Abdy about them.'

Miss Calthrop felt that the ground was cut from under her feet. She knew when she came that she had not much of a case, and would not have ventured to try it on with a man, for instance; but she thought that she might play a

game of bluff, and frighten a young and inexperienced girl into promising her a pretty considerable sum of money to destroy the letters, and keep the secret of them. To suggest the idea that some fraud had been practised in order to obtain the inheritance seemed to her almost a stroke of genius ; she imagined that Nora would be willing to sacrifice a good deal to prevent even the possibility of such a terrible scandal as that ; but the stroke of genius had been a dismal failure ; and the four discoveries that had been thrust upon her, one after the other, each one more astounding than the last—Mr. Lester's death, the loss of the fortune, Noel's identity, and his engagement to Nora—finally crushed her. With a trembling hand she opened the little black bag, and drew out the packet of letters.

' I willingly give them to you, Miss Lester,' she said, in a rather uncertain voice ; ' it is right, as you say, that you should have them. It will be a great weight off my mind to get rid of them.'

She seemed to have suddenly shrunk up, and she handed the letters with such a depressed air, that Nora felt a movement of compassion towards her.

' I will speak to Mr. Dupleix about you when I have an opportunity, Miss Calthrop,' she said mildly ; ' thank you. Good afternoon.'

' Good afternoon, Miss Lester,' and Miss Calthrop bowed herself out of the room, and, at the same time, out of this story.

Nora sat once more alone, with the packet of letters lying in her lap. She recognised the handwriting on the faded yellow paper. Not creditable to her father, that woman said.

It might be true, it might not. One thing was certain, no one should ever know.

Miss Calthrop was the only living person who had read those letters, and it was for her interest to keep quiet about them now.

No one else, not even Nora herself, should ever read them.

She went to the stove, thrust the letters in, struck a match, and set them alight.

Did any, the faintest, desire come over her to know what

secret they contained? I think not. Such curiosity as that was not in Nora's nature.

It happened, as it sometimes does when papers are burning, that as they curled and blazed, here and there a word started out with sudden distinctness. Once it was her own name; once it was just her father's signature, 'G. LESTER.'

She turned and raked the papers carefully, until they were a little heap of indistinguishable ashes. Then she collected them, and carried them to the window. There was a strong breeze blowing outside, and in another moment the ashes of Gerald Lester's letters were scattered to the four winds of heaven.

## CHAPTER XLI

'There stirred no breath of air to wake to life  
 The slumbers of the world. The sky above  
 Was one grey, changeless cloud. There looked no eye  
 Of Life from the veiled heavens ; but Sleep and Death  
 Were round me everywhere.'

'It's as dark as Egypt,' said Noel to himself.

It really was a darkness that could be felt. The sky was all one cloud, from which no single star looked forth. The only indication of bush or kopje was a patch of even denser darkness. The very air seemed to have fallen into a breathless slumber. There was nothing above, below, around, but black, impenetrable night.

Noel felt it eerie, and wished for daylight. He had overcome the timidity of his boyhood, but he was always impressionable and highly strung, and to-night his nerves seemed all on end. They were out on patrol, about twenty-five of them, and Noel was doing sentry duty.

He had not taken very kindly to the rough life of a soldier on active service, although he did his duty conscientiously, and was, as he always had been, a general favourite. None of his comrades had the slightest idea that he was Johnson who had been in prison, suspected as a spy. To them he was Dupleix, and had never been anything else. That secret was in safe keeping.

It was just about Christmas time again, and Noel as he stood patiently alert, looking and listening, yet half in a dream, allowed his thoughts to wander back over the past four years. Christmas four years ago he had been in London, enjoying its gaieties night after night with a heart absolutely free from care.

Would he have exchanged this present for that past if he could ? No ; for then he had not known Nora.

Christmas three years ago he had started on his long

walk from Capetown. How he had hated Capetown then, and never wished to see it again ! Now it was associated with the happiest hours of his life. Yes, the happiest, in spite of the cloud that rested on him.

Christmas one year ago, what a black dismal memory that was ! As bleak, as gloomy as this obscurity of night that surrounded him. Could he ever have believed that so much joy, so much hope as he now possessed could have risen to him out of that pit of calamity ? And to whom was it all owing, his salvation, his restoration, his new life ? To whom but to his friend, the man whose strength had redeemed his weakness, and whose constancy had never forgotten him ?

It was characteristic of Noel that, in dwelling on their friendship, he always thought of the benefits conferred on him by Gronow, but it never occurred to him that he could have conferred any in return. He would have been quite astonished could he have known how much good influence his refined and lovable nature had exercised over Gronow's sterner character, and how often the thought of him had made Gronow gentler and more lenient towards other young fellows whose faults and failures brought them under his correction. The friendship that seemed so unaccountable to outsiders was perhaps more equal in reality than anyone could have supposed. And meanwhile the night seemed to grow blacker and denser, as the morning hours approached. Noel felt the silence weigh on his spirit like the presence of death ; and now and again a chill came over him, as of some dread presentiment.

Was that a sound, a movement ?

In a moment he was straining every sense to pierce through that dead wall of darkness.

Where was it ?

If anywhere, it was over there, where he knew, though he could not say he saw, that there was a clump of bush. How far away ? Perhaps a hundred yards, it might be a little more or less.

No, there was nothing, it was his overstrained fancy --and yet, yes ! there was something. The darkness

moved within the darkness—something or someone was there.

Noel challenged the unseen mystery, and immediately a shot rang out in reply. The whizzing of the bullet, as it passed close to him, seemed to him like a welcome leap into the realities of every-day life; he fired instantly in return, aiming at blackness; and his shot took effect, for he heard a groan out of the darkness.

By this time the rest of the party were mounted and ready for an attack. A few more shots were exchanged, but the enemy, who had evidently counted on a complete surprise, retired without coming any nearer, and totally unseen.

Having convinced themselves that the Boers were gone, and were not likely to return, at all events before daylight, the troopers added themselves up, and reported no casualties, not even a scratch.

'I believe I hit someone the first time I fired,' said Noel; 'but he may have got away.'

'I thought I heard a groan,' said another man.

'He may be lying there wounded,' observed the captain; 'we must have a look.'

'By heaven, it's black enough to choke one!' remarked another man. 'We couldn't find a mountain without a light of some sort.'

They lit a lantern, and groped amidst the bush.

'Here he is,' exclaimed one of them suddenly, 'but he's as dead as last Christmas. That was a rattling good chance shot of yours, Dupleix.'

Noel came up reluctantly; he could fight as well as any man in the heat and excitement of a general engagement, but he did not like to stand still and look on a man whom he had shot dead.

'There is nothing to be done but to bury him then,' he said.

'Which shall be done at once,' added the captain. 'Let us have a look at him first.'

The man who held the lantern turned the light on to the face.

Noel, who was close beside him, started violently.

'Oh, heavens!' he exclaimed, 'I shot him in the dark; I never could have dreamed that it was he!'

The captain bent over the body, and he, too, recognised the features.

'Why,' he said, 'if it isn't that arch-rebel, Cornelius Botha! You need not regret having shot *him*, Dupleix; it's about the best day's work you ever did.'

'Would you rather have taken him alive?' asked another man.

'I would rather have had nothing at all to do with him,' answered Noel, turning away.

He helped with a very sore heart to bury his uncle. He had disowned this man, he had hated him, he had felt more bitter towards him than ever towards any man; yet, now that he had, however unwittingly, taken his life, he shuddered at himself for having done it.

And yet what a strange fate, he thought, as he helped to throw on the earth that hid those once familiar features from his eyes for ever; what a strange fate that his unconscious hand should have avenged Nora's father! He could never have done it deliberately. Had he met his uncle in battle by daylight, he would have tried to avoid him; but this was indeed a stroke of fate.

He wondered what Nora would think of it; and after that he wondered what Hester would think of it; and the weight on his spirit seemed heavier than ever.

It was some time before either of these questions was answered for him; but he did have the answers at last.

Nora wrote to him as soon as she heard of the incident:

'I know, dear Noel, just how you are feeling about it. It must be a dreadful feeling, worse than any I have ever had. But these are the sad chances of war, and we must not grow morbid over them. If you have done your duty, you must not be unhappy about side issues which are not under your control. I am selfish, Noel, I love you so; I cannot bear to think of you unhappy about anything.'

And when Noel read that, he felt that he could not be long unhappy about anything while Nora 'loved him so.'

It was a long time after that that he received a few lines from Hester Steynberg, as her name was now.

'I do not blame you, Noel,' she wrote, 'for you did not know it, and you could not help it. I know you would not have done it purposely, for you are not revengeful. We cannot meet again, but I shall always think of you kindly, and I hope that you, too, will never have an unkind thought of your cousin Hester.'

'Poor Hester, she is not such a bad sort after all,' was Noel's reflection; 'she did not mind running into danger when she thought my life was in question. I should be the last one ever to think unkindly of her.'

That was the last time he ever heard from Hester, and he never met her afterwards.

## CHAPTER XLII

'The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel ;

To thine own self be true ;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.'

IT was about this time that Gronow, having employment in the Intelligence Department, and being settled, for the time being, at Bloemfontein, sent for his wife and Nora to join him.

'Your quarters will be small,' he wrote, 'but no worse than they are now; and we shall be together, which is the chief thing.'

It was, indeed, chief above all other things. After fifteen weary months of separation, to be once more with her husband seemed to Alice the only thing she really cared for; and Nora was scarcely less happy, for she felt that she would be much nearer to Noel there than in Capetown, and as if there might be at least a chance of an occasional glimpse of him. And so, in fact, it proved; for, when they had been about three weeks in Bloemfontein, Noel, finding himself within galloping distance, obtained two days' leave, and paid them a flying visit.

These brief glimpses of sunshine, in the midst of cloudy and stormy days, are more valued than the long sunshiny months of unbroken prosperity, and far more vividly recalled in after years.

Noel was bronzed, healthy, and in good spirits.

'I did not like it much at first, but I am used to it now,' he said, when Gronow inquired how soldiering agreed with him, 'and I am as fit as possible. Just now we are only guarding the line, which is fairly monotonous work, but not particularly dangerous.'

'Never mind the monotony, then,' said Nora.

Noel laughed.

'We prefer the fun all the same,' he observed; 'although,' he added with a graver face, 'one sees and hears such terribly sad things, that one cannot even speak of them afterwards. I shall be heartily glad when it is all over.'

'What do you mean to do when the war is over, Noel?' asked Alice.

'Farm, I think,' replied Noel cheerfully; 'you see, I shall have a little capital to start with, and there will always be that money to fall back upon. I would rather go into an agricultural district, that seems to me much the nicest kind of farming. And Nora likes the life.'

'It is just what Nora is cut out for,' remarked Gronow, 'and I think you have a fair chance of success if you will be prudent.'

'Oh, I will take good advice, and settle down into a sober country gentleman,' returned Noel.

He took the opportunity of being alone with Gronow for a few minutes to say to him:

'Gronow, do you think we are bound to keep to that five years that Lester imposed upon us?'

'No,' replied Gronow at once, 'I do not think so myself; but of course it must depend on what Nora feels about her father's wishes.'

'Of course; but if she is willing, you would not see any objection to our getting married sooner?'

'No, Alice and I were both twenty when we married, and we have never repented it.'

'Well, I don't pretend to be such a wise fellow as you, Gronow, but I have had some pretty rough lessons, and I think I have learned them. You trust me, don't you?'

'I always did trust you, Noel. I mean, that I always believed what you told me about yourself. How could I call myself your friend otherwise?'

'Thank you,' said Noel, very earnestly; 'then if I ask Nora to shorten the time, you will take my part?'

'Yes, I will certainly.'

When Gronow went away to attend to his duties, Alice

took the children out, leaving Noel and Nora together for awhile. She knew how precious these few minutes, snatched from the tumult of war-time, must be to them. Noel's courting days were certainly far from cloudless. He had to make the best of these few intermittent hours.

'Nora, darling,' he began pleadingly; 'do you think we are quite bound to keep to those five years of probation? Would it go very much against your feelings to shorten them?'

Nora sat silent, with eyes cast down. Noel's beseeching tone and the gently caressing hand on her shoulder were very persuasive, and he had suffered so much already.

'If Gronow and Alice thought it right——' she began.

'Gronow does. I asked him,' put in Noel.

Another pause. Then Nora said, very softly: 'Then I don't mind, Noel. I am so *very* glad that father withdrew his refusal in that last letter of his. I could never have been quite so happy without that as I am now; but I don't want to make you wait five years if you—if you really think it too long, Noel.'

'I think it very long, certainly,' he replied, 'and if you trust me——'

'How can you say "if?"' exclaimed Nora; 'if I did not trust you enough for that, how should I trust you at all? How could I say, I will trust you five years hence, but not now?'

Noel drew her to him silently.

'Then, Nora,' he said at length, 'when the war is over, and I am able to make a home—will you marry me then?'

'Yes, Noel,' almost inaudibly; and then, with a mischievous upward glance, 'and if the war is not over in five years?'

'There will be none of us left,' replied Noel; 'we shall be like the Kilkenny cats.'

'Do you really think it will last much longer?'

'I don't see why it should not last another year. But, you know, dear, when I am on duty I hear no news at all. I only know just what is happening round me. By the way, I have not shown you this.'

He took Hester's letter out of his pocket, and gave it to her. Nora read it with a changing face. When she gave it back to him, she said : 'It was very nice of her to write to you like that. Even if you never meet her again, you would not like to think that she felt badly towards you.'

'I never wish to meet her again,' Noel replied ; 'but, as you say, I would much rather know that we part without anger or bitterness.'

'There is something I must tell you too,' said Nora presently, 'and that is about Miss Calthrop.'

'Miss *Calthrop*,' exclaimed Noel, astonished.

'Yes, she is out here, or she was, a little while ago. She came to see me.'

Nora then related their interview with great accuracy. Noel was immensely interested, and also amused. His comment on it was :

'So she really is an old humbug after all. Fancy her trying to blackmail you in that fashion ! But it strikes me that you are quite able to take care of yourself, Nora. She does not seem to have got much satisfaction out of you !'

'She rather frightened me at first,' Nora admitted, 'but I soon saw that she had no proof of what she said. And then she made me angry about the letters, and I did not care after that.'

'And you destroyed the letters without reading them,' observed Noel.

'Yes, of course I did. I know father did wrong things when he was young, but he was good afterwards ; and I shall always think of him at his best.'

'So shall I,' replied Noel sincerely. He had no particular reason to love Mr. Lester, but he always remembered that Lester had received an injury from his father, and had been shot in cold blood by his uncle ; he admired the man's pluck, and, moreover, he was Nora's father.

'Noel, do you really think Miss Calthrop ought to have any money ?' Nora asked him.

'She certainly has no claim, dear. Although,' with a sudden smiling recollection, 'I did promise her five thousand pounds if I married the heiress.'

'If you married the heiress!' repeated Nora, bewildered.

Noel related that little episode between himself and Miss Calthrop, and they both laughed over it.

'Still I think it is a most extraordinary thing,' Nora observed presently, 'that after all you should marry the heiress.'

'Extraordinary perhaps, but very satisfactory,' returned Noel. 'I think,' he added, 'that when our affairs are quite settled, and we know exactly what we have, that we might send Miss Calthrop a little present. She certainly had a right to expect more from Miss Lanyon; and she is old, and cannot work. Poverty does mislead people into these mean expedients sometimes, and I have always felt sorry for her.'

Nora heartily concurred in this, thinking at the same time how much generosity and good feeling Noel showed in matters of this kind.

After this Alice and Gronow both came in again, for the day—Noel's one happy day—was fast waning.

'Do you know that the Mayers are going back to their farm, Noel?' Alice asked him.

'How is that?' he asked.

'Their nephew Gilbert is coming to live with them. His corps is disbanded, and he will help Mr. Mayer to get things straight again.'

'I am glad of that,' Noel replied heartily. 'Old Mayer could not do it by himself, and I could see that he was really miserable in Capetown, and longing to get back to the farm.'

'Miss Mayer says, Eldred not like town life at all, wants to get home badly,' observed Nora, taking off the old lady's manner so exactly that they all smiled.

Thus in pleasant intimate converse the last hours flew by. How they counted those hours, Noel and Nora, 'e'en as a miser counts his gold'! Yet, in spite of the sadness, their hearts were full of hope and courage, for they had confidence that these stolen days of sunshine were but a foretaste of many happier days to come. All things must come to an end some time, even Boer wars; and patience

and constancy do have their reward, even in this world, for some of us.

And so at the actual moment of parting they smiled and spoke cheerful words that came from their hearts. They had the best of earthly possessions—youth, love, and hope—without which other possessions are apt to turn to dust and ashes.

As he took his leave, Noel said to Gronow :  
‘ I have one more thing to ask of you, Gronow.’

‘ And that is——?’ returned Gronow.

‘ You would not give me back the leaden anchor when I asked you for it before ; you told me to claim it again in happier days. These are happier days—no doubt about that. Give it back to me now.’

‘ Here it is then,’ said Gronow smiling, as he detached it from his watch chain, and gave it to Noel ; ‘ when you come to think of it, it is a memento of some rather strange events.’

‘ It is more than that to me,’ answered Noel, ‘ it is the outward sign and symbol of a lifelong bond of friendship.’

‘ So be it,’ Gronow said, as once more they clasped hands.

THE END



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